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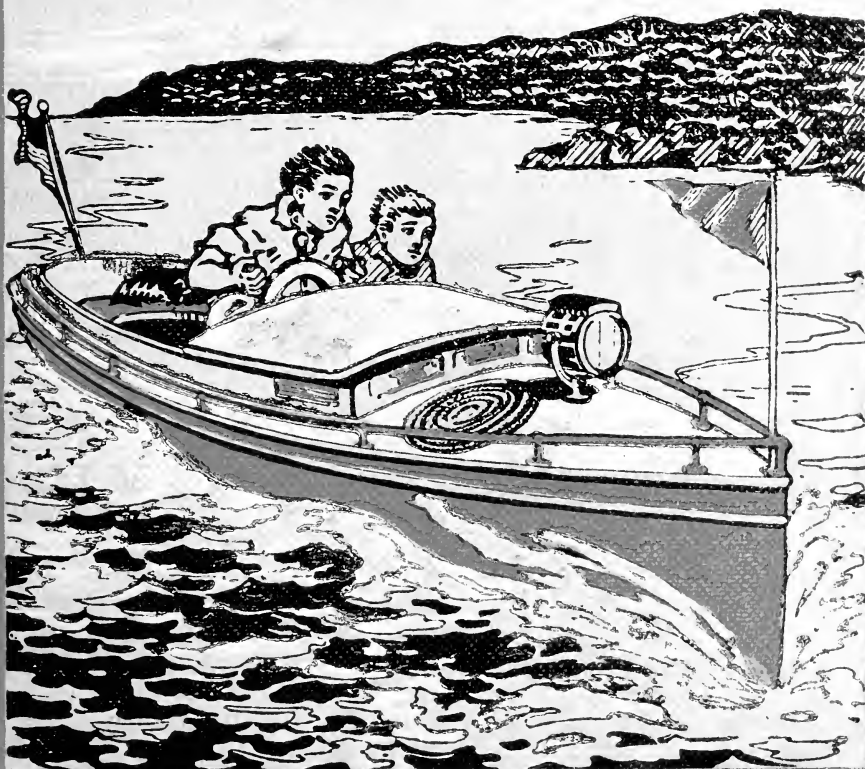


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OTOR-BOAT BOYS

ON THE COLUMBIA

BY
~ HARRY · GORDON ~



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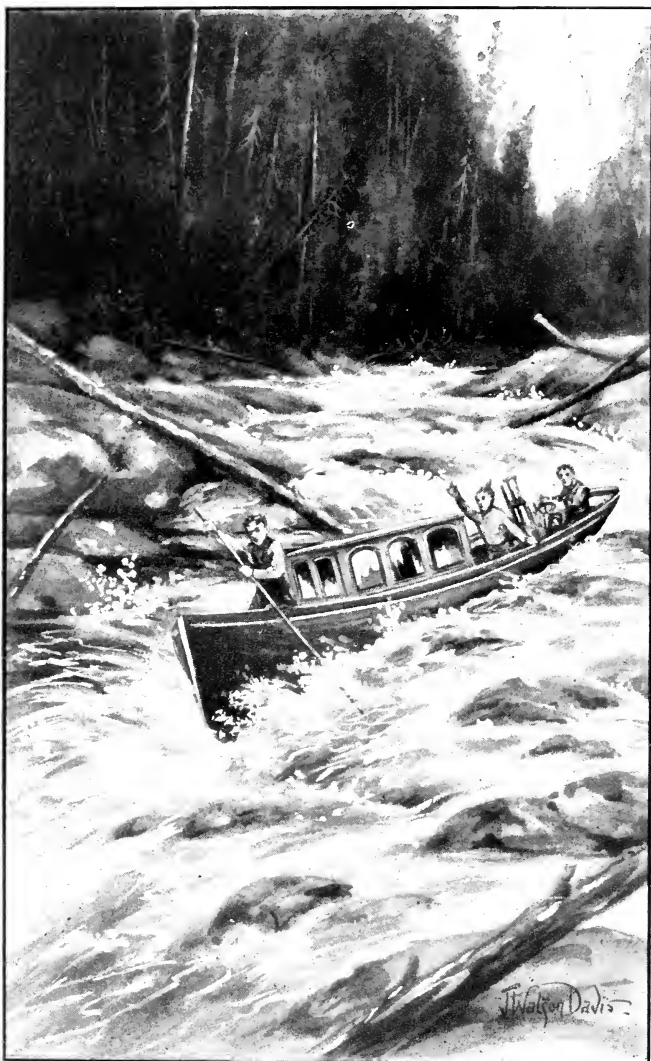
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"Full speed ahead!" roared Clay. "Our only hope is to keep her dead with the current and fight her through."
Page 150.

River Motor Boys on the Columbia

The River Motor Boat Boys On the Columbia

OR

The Confession of a Photograph.

By HARRY GORDON

AUTHOR OF

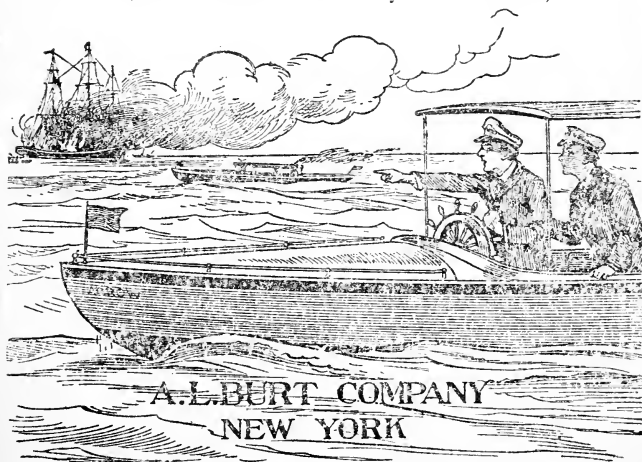
"The River Motor Boat Boys on the St. Lawrence,"

"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Colorado."

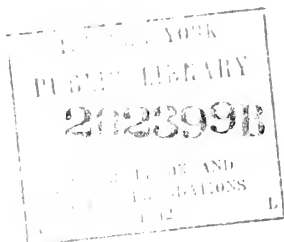
"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Mississippi,"

"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Amazon."

"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Ohio,"



A.F.E.



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THE SIX RIVER MOTOR BOYS ON THE COLUMBIA

SIX RIVER MOTOR BOYS ON THE COLUMBIA

CHAPTER I.

CROSSING THE MOUNTAINS IN A MOTOR BOAT.

THE motor boat *Rambler* lay at the very summit of the Rocky Mountains. She was not in a lake, either, although there were lakes of ice not far away. She was not in motion, and there was a great silence all around her.

She lay, propped upright, on a platform car, and the car, with two broken wheels, stood on a make-shift spur of track on the right-of-way of the Canadian Pacific railroad. An unusual place to find a motor boat. But listen.

The *Rambler* was *en route* from the South Branch, Chicago, to the headwaters of the Columbia river. She had passed without serious accident

down Lake Michigan, through the Straits of Mackinaw, through the Sault Ste. Marie river and canal, and over the crystal waters of old Superior to Port Arthur, where she had been coaxed to the deck of the platform car upon which she now stood.

Almost exactly on the boundary line between Alberta and British Columbia the flat car had come to grief, and the trainmen had bunted it to the spur and gone on about their business, promising to order a wrecker at the nearest telegraph office. The disabled car tilted frightfully to the rear as it stood on the shaky track, giving the platform a twenty-five per cent. pitch, and causing the *Rambler* to take on a rakish air, like a swaggering person with his hat set on the back of his head.

A few miles to the east was Laggan, sometimes called Lake Louise, which is 2,368 miles from Montreal and 5,032 feet above the level of the Pacific ocean, 500 miles away. About the same distance to the west was Field, sometimes called Emerald Lake, 2,387 miles from Montreal and over 4,000 feet above tidewater. The highest altitude on the boundary at that point is 5,200 feet above the ocean, and the motor boat was just about there.

It was close to sunset of an April day, and the

mountain pass was cold and desolate. There was snow on the peaks, and a cold wind blew whistling through the narrow cut in the gray rock. There was no living figure in sight from the sidling platform of the car, or from the foot-square windows of the *Rambler's* tiny cabin. The silence was broken only by the uneasy wind.

Decidedly it was anything but cheerful outside. Inside, there was a glowing fire in a small coal stove, and a shaded electric light brought out the cozy furnishings of the place. The electric generators were not working, the motors being silent, but there was in the accumulators sufficient current for the light and the little electric stove upon which a supper was cooking.

Those who have followed the fortunes of the *Rambler* to the headwaters of the Amazon will understand without further detail exactly what kind of a craft she was. After returning from the South American expedition, the lads had planned a trip to the Columbia river, and they were now on their way to Donald, where the motor boat was to be launched into the waters of that interesting stream.

The boys had worked hard in Chicago all through

the winter, and when April came they were ready for the journey, although their supply of money was not as large as they had hoped to make it. Of the five who had visited Cloud island and secured the store of gold hidden in that semi-volcanic heap of rocks, however, only three were in shape to set out on the proposed voyage.

Frank Porter, who owned the gold taken from Cloud island, had insisted on financing the trip, but this the self-reliant boys would not listen to, preferring to depend upon their own exertions. Julian Shafer, in the interest of whose health the Amazon trip had originally been planned, had acquired a little property through the exertions of Dr. Holcomb, the physician who was treating him for tuberculosis, and had decided to spend the winter and summer at Los Angeles.

So, of the five, there remained only Clayton Emmett, Cornelius Witters, and Alexander Smithwick to carry out the exploration of the Columbia the following spring. It was hoped, however, that both Frank and Julian would be able to join their friends at some point lower down. The story of the boys' adventures on the Amazon may be found in the first volume of this series.

On this night, then, "Clay," "Case," and "Alex.," as they were familiarly called, were gathered around the coal heater in the cabin of the *Rambler*, high up in a rocky pass on a mountain range, the range forming the backbone of the continent of North America. There was plenty of coal on the platform car, and so they had no fear of passing a chill as well as a desolate night on the great divide. Also, the boys had plenty of provisions, as there were numerous boxes on the car which were to be emptied of their eatables and carried on board the motor boat whenever the great river was reached.

The leasing of the car had eaten into the finances of the boys quite seriously, but they anticipated living mostly on game and fish during the run down the Columbia to the Pacific ocean. They had made no calculations for the return ride to Chicago, believing that they would be able to find employment at Portland.

Boy like, they had figured on the future only so far as the end of the river journey was concerned. A motor boat trip down the Columbia was too fascinating, they declared, to be mixed up with any prosaic monetary calculations!

"If we go broke," Case had said, when the closing details were under discussion, "we can walk back! I'd rather swim around Cape Horn and walk back to little old Chicago than miss the days and nights we are going to have on the Columbia!"

"You're light headed!" Alex. had responded.

"That will be an aid in swimming!" Case had replied. "Anyway, it is the Columbia first. The future may take care of itself!"

This night in the mountain pass should have been spent on the Columbia at or near Donald, but the boys were by no means discouraged. Case was inclined to express annoyance and disgust at unfavorable conditions, but really he was as courageous in the face of difficulties as either of his companions. They had been left on the spur early that morning, and had anticipated relief in the shape of a wrecking outfit before noon.

While the supper of bacon, beans, pancakes and coffee sputtered and steamed on the electric stove and the heater sent out generous waves of warmth, Clay arose and opened the cabin door, which faced to the west. The wind immediately chased itself into the room, played tag with everything movable, and went whistling cheerily out again.

At a shout of remonstrance from Alex., Clay drew the door shut and stepped out on the deck of the *Rambler*. He stood for a second with the wind from the Pacific keen on his face, the ruddy light of the setting sun bright in his eyes, and then beckoned, through the glass panel of the door, to the boys inside. Case was too busy over the pancakes to notice the signal, but Alex. increased Case's anger by opening the door again and forcing his body out against the wind.

The sun dropping lower, the pencils of light which touched the crags were slipping away, leaving them indistinct in the gathering night, as if the sunlight had brought them into existence with a touch and condemned them to obliteration by withdrawing itself from their angular sides. The boys stood for a second in silence, Clay listening.

"Huh!" Alex. grinned, catching Clay by the arm and pointing to the wild country to the west. "This makes me feel queer! Why, we might be the sons of Noah, looking out of the Ark after it stranded on Mt. Ararat! Here we are, in a boat up on the mountains, and there, below, is the lifeless world! I wonder," he continued, nudging Clay in the ribs to give emphasis to his observation, "if we had a dove,

and the dove should be sent out, whether it would bring back an engine with a car fitted up to drag this old hulk to the railroad hospital? ”

“ No dove would mind bringing a wrecking train back in his bill! ” replied Clay. “ Of course not! ”

“ Well,” Alex. insisted, “ we’ve got to get help from some source. Two trains have passed us to-day without a whisper of help. A steamer on the ocean wouldn’t pass a wrecked boat like that! ”

Clay bent his head and shielded his ears with cupped palms.

“ There’s a train coming now,” he declared.

“ That’s the wind! ” Alex. answered.

“ Can’t you hear it pounding, pounding up the grade to the east? ” demanded Clay. “ There! ” he added, as a sharp whistle was borne faintly to their ears against the rush of the wind, “ didn’t you hear that? ”

“ Sure! ” Alex. replied. “ And it isn’t a passenger, either. A loaded freight, all right. Here’s where we get out! ”

The roaring of the train wheels, the sharp hissing of the laboring exhaust, the pounding of the strain-

ing drivers, came nearer and nearer, then only the wind was heard.

"Phantom train!" Alex. laughed. "Nothing doing!"

Case came out of the cabin and stood holding the edge of the door in his hand, his eyes fixed on his chums.

"Do we get away now?" he asked. "I hear a train coming."

"She is stalled on the grade, I guess," Clay replied. "Anyway, she isn't coming any nearer."

"Oh, well," Case grumbled, "I suppose we can stay out here until the railroad gets a new wrecking crew and a new machine made! Old Rip Van Winkle's little mountain stunt was a summer night on a sleeping porch compared with this. If anybody should come along in the next hundred years, just wake me up, will you?"

"Going to bed?" asked Clay, with a laugh.

"You bet he isn't!" shouted Alex. "He hasn't had his supper yet. Catch him going to bed without pancakes and bacon!"

"And the pancakes are burning, too!" cried Case, entering the cabin and slamming the door after him.

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"Come on, Case," urged Alex. "Let's go down the grade and see what's the matter, and what sort of a train it is."

"We'll find out soon enough if we remain here," Clay answered. "Besides, we ought to be getting things propped up in the cabin, so there will be a little furniture left when we get bumped out on the main track."

"Oh, they'll just pry the truck up with a jack, put in new wheels, and we'll sail away like a ship on a summer sea!" Alex. grinned. "If you won't go, I'll go alone."

Before Clay could utter the remonstrance that was on his lips, the boy was away down the grade to the east, his cap bobbing along the ties ahead of his leaping feet, his hair flying in the gale.

Before he was well out of sight around an angle in the pass the rumble of a heavy train was heard again, and directly the round, red eye of a headlight met the ruddy illumination of the sun in the narrow pass. Clay could see the smutty face of the engineer peering out of the cab window as the engine toiled, panting, upward, and then he saw the fireman looking over his shoulder.

Both were gazing, with no little wonder showing

on their faces, at the unusual sight of a motor boat perched on a platform car at the summit of the Rocky Mountains. Clay stood hopeful for a moment, and then the train roared toward the grade to the east, winding down like a snake in the fading light.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN JOE FOLLOWS A TRAIL.

CLAY stood dejectedly for a moment, his hands in his pockets, his eyes following the streamer of smoke which marked the progress of the inhospitable train. Then the cabin door opened and a white bulldog with friendly eyes and a monster of a jaw walked forth in a dignified manner and sat down to look over the scenery.

"What do you think of that, Captain Joe?" Clay asked, patting the dog on the head. "Isn't that just about the worst luck in the world? I wish you could grip that train by the cowcatcher and bring it back here. It ought to have helped us out."

Captain Joe, looking in the direction of the column of smoke, fast disappearing, worked his lips into a snarl which showed a set of capable teeth. He evi-

dently agreed with Clay as to the moral character of the person in charge of the train.

Case opened the cabin door and looked out, waving a pancake turner in one hand. He smiled when he noted Clay's discouraged attitude.

"Fine, eh?" he cried. "If I had in a book all the things the Canadian Pacific people do not know about relieving a fellow in distress, I'd have the biggest volume ever printed!"

"Perhaps the people who left us here neglected to notify division headquarters," suggested Clay, never willing to pass censure until all the facts were at hand. "Anyway, we're probably here for the night, so we may as well make the best of it. Supper ready?"

"Hot on the table," replied Case. "Where's Alex.?"

"He went down the grade, east, and will doubtless be back in a moment. Flag him with a pancake, and he'll come running!"

"Go bring him, Captain Joe," ordered Case. "Go tell Alex. that the last call for supper is on in the dining car."

Captain Joe wiggled his stumpy ears, agitated his excuse for a tail, and turned a wrinkled nose to the

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north. In a moment he started away in that direction.

"Here!" called Clay, "Alex. didn't go in that direction! Come here, you foolish dog, that's not the right way to go! Come on back here!"

Captain Joe looked back condescendingly, as if he realized that he was doing business with a very young person who really did not know what he was talking about, and, crouching down, uttered a low threat of a growl.

"There's something in there," Case decided, "some man or some wild animal. Captain Joe doesn't often make mistakes. I'll get a searchlight and take a look. He may have discovered something good to eat!"

"Be careful," advised Clay. "It isn't more than a hundred feet back to the wall of rock, and whatever is in there, man or beast, is pretty close to us. Wait until I get my gun."

The searchlight revealed nothing save bare rock and stunted, starved shrubs which grew protestingly in such shallow soil as had found its way into the crevices of the rocks.

"You're a rattle-headed dog, Captain Joe," Clay

admonished, as the boys turned back toward the platform car and its cargo of motor boat.

But Captain Joe was not inclined to accept this reproof lightly. Instead of going back with the boys, he bounded to a sloping shelf of rock and uttered a succession of growls, menacing and deep-chested.

"There *is* something up there!" Case commented. "It may be a bear. There are bears in British Columbia, you know."

"You are likely to know it, if you go up there," Clay laughed. "I advise you to keep away."

"Do the bears of British Columbia talk?" asked Case, who was closer to the dog and the shelf of rock than his companion."

"Yes; with their teeth," answered Clay.

"Well, this bear, the one up on the rocks, is trying to coax the dog up to him," answered Case. "I heard him tell Captain Joe that he was making a great mistake in looking upon him as an enemy, or words to that effect. Captain Joe doesn't believe him, at that!"

"You heard a voice up there?" interrogated Clay, hardly crediting the statement. "I guess you are having a dream!"

Captain Joe passed out of sight in the dusk and his hoarse protests died away. Clay called to him to come back, but the dog did not make his appearance.

"I'm going after him," Case declared. "He may get shot. There's a man in there, all right!"

Clay held his chum back with both hands and called again and again to the dog. Directly Captain Joe returned, looking very much like a boy who had been invited to a delightful excursion and then detained at home by parental command. He crouched down at Clay's feet, but kept his eyes on the rocks above.

"I guess the dog knows," Case argued. "You can't fool Captain Joe. There is some one hiding in the rocks."

"Look here," argued Clay, "we've been lying here since early this morning, haven't we? Well, that is only a narrow place, between the spur and the almost perpendicular wall of rock, and we would have seen anybody sneaking about, wouldn't we? Why, I've been up there where the dog went half a dozen times to-day, and there was no sign of a person there, no sort of a place for one to hide in. You heard a wild animal growling, that's what you heard."

"I guess I know what I heard!" Case contended.

"Perhaps you'd better tell me I'm stone deaf! I tell you I heard a human voice, speaking to the dog!"

"If there was any one in hiding it was Alex., playing some of his foolish pranks," insisted Clay.

"Oh, yes!" laughed Case. "The dog wouldn't have gone to Alex. if asked to! Of course not! And Captain Joe would have made a bristle of his back and growled at Alex., like he did that fellow up there! Of course he would! You can say what you like, but I'm going to see what it was Captain Joe growled at. I need a little exercise, anyway!"

"It is a wonder Alex. wouldn't come back," Clay remarked, as Case, armed with a searchlight and an automatic, started away.

The boy turned back at mention of the absence of his chum.

"He may be in trouble," he said. "He may have come across the man who is hiding up yonder. I'll look him up, all right."

Night had fallen, a dull, windy night, with now and then a star showing through driving masses of clouds. There would be a moon later, but now the spaces below, the canyons and the lifting peaks, were as thoroughly out of sight as if the sun had lugged

them off with him across the wide stretches of the Pacific ocean!

"You stay here and watch the boat," Clay urged, in a moment, "and I'll take Captain Joe and go down the track. The dog will follow the trail Alex. left, and we'll soon know where the boy is."

Case grumbled not a little at this arrangement, for it was his nature to be in the thick of any ruction within sound of his ears, but he finally consented to remain with the motor boat and entered the cabin.

"I'll make a light lunch of a couple of dozen pancakes," he called from the doorway, as Clay and Captain Joe passed out of sight in the darkness.

Alone in the little room, the boy trimmed the fire, put on more coal, removed a scorched pan of cakes from the electric stove, and then sat down to listen and wait. He was by far too anxious and excited to partake of the feast he had prepared for all three.

The wind lifted directly and howled more dismally around the boat, tearing at the window sash and rattling the door as if with human hands. Then Case turned off the electric light, switched out the cooking fire, drew a chair covered with a coat in front of the coal stove, so that the live coals and the flames might not show through the crevices about

the openings, and sat silent and, if the exact truth must be told, not a little afraid.

The boy would have bravely faced almost any peril that came to him openly and in the light of day, but this sitting alone, in the darkness, with the wind storming like mad through the pass, more than five thousand feet above tidewater, was a little too much. He wanted action. He found himself unable to sit there alone and wait. Clay and Alex. seemed to be away a long time.

Finally he armed himself again and went out, softly closing the door behind him in order that any lurking person might not know that he was abroad. He shivered a moment in the cold wind and then crouched down under one of the windows.

Once he thought he heard a call from the east, but the wind hissed in his ears so insistently that he could not be sure that it was a human voice he heard. He strained his eyes down the pass in the hope of seeing Clay's electric torch, but the darkness was not broken.

"They might at least give me a signal!" he mused.

But no signal came, and the lonely boy huddled closer to the side of the motor boat and waited and

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listened. According to the schedule made out in Chicago, he should now be on the deck of a floating boat, instead of on the deck of a craft stuck up like a house on wheels on the planks of a platform car.

Instead of sitting there in the wind at the very summit of the Rocky mountains, he should have been viewing the never-failing panorama of the Columbia river, somewhere below Donald, fifty or more miles to the west. Besides being lonely, there was in the heart of the boy a feeling of apprehension which he could not shake off.

There surely must be something wrong down the pass, he believed. Captain Joe would follow the tracks left by Alex., and Clay would follow the dog. This should have brought the searcher to some disclosure long before. He had decided to leave the boat and follow on down the trail when a sound at the side of the car attracted his attention.

It seemed to the listener that some one was climbing up on the platform, moving stealthily, still clumsily enough to be heard above the rush of the wind. The boy sat perfectly still, ready with his electric flashlight and his automatic revolver.

The intruder, whoever it was, came nearer, and Case knew that he had now reached the floor of the

car and was moving toward the motor boat. Even if the lad's position had enabled him to view the slow progress of the intruder, which it did not, he could not have followed his movements with his eyes because of the darkness.

There was nothing to do but wait until the skulker came under the prow lamp of the boat. Then, by the turning of a switch from the corner of the cabin structure, the boy could throw a glaring light over the whole car as well as the deck of the motor boat. Thus revealed, and dazed by the sudden illumination, the prowling man might easily be seen and brought to terms.

Mixed with a sense of danger in the heart of the boy was a feeling of anger at the impudence of the fellow, and with both emotions was merged a curiosity to know what the chap's motive could be, how he came to be there, and what could be his object in hiding instead of approaching openly. The footsteps moved forward over the planks of the car and a trembling motion ran through the timbers of the boat as a weight tipped it a trifle to one side in mounting to the deck.

Off to the east Case thought he caught a glimmer of light—not a white strong light, such as would

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come from an electric torch, but a dull, reddish glow, such as would be likely to come from the hot coals of a campfire. As he looked, the glow grew, as if the coals, stirred by the wind had burst into a brisker flame.

Then the boy heard the intruder approaching the door of the cabin, his approach louder and more confident because of the darkness and silence inside, and, reaching out, turned on the great electric light at the prow.

CHAPTER III.

ALEX. FINDS USE FOR HIS KODAK.

WHEN the long freight train dashed by Alex. without slowing down, he stood for an instant frowning and shaking his clenched fist at the rear brakeman, who swung his lantern in derision and passed into the caboose.

"Nice thing!" muttered the boy. "Now we've got to stop here all night! Whee! Case will have a fit, all right! If this hard luck keeps up, he'll get so he can have two fits at a time! That will be fine!"

Alex. was about to turn to the track again and walk back to the flat car when the thought came to him that the conductor might have misunderstood orders regarding the exact location of the side-tracked car and stopped at the wrong place. Railroad men often did things like that, he reasoned!

"He stopped, all right," the boy muttered, "for

there wasn't a hint of the rumbling of wheels in the air for full five minutes. Now, if he didn't stop to pick us up, what did he stop for? I'll go and find out!"

It was a problem which, to the inquisitive mind of the lad, required an immediate solution, so he faced east again and plodded along the track in the gathering night. A short distance away he came to a spot where tracks showed that the train had halted.

It was in a narrow canyon between two towering peaks, and, just off the south rail, lay a great rock. Around it were the footprints, and also the deep indentations of a crowbar, which had evidently been used by the trainmen in prying the boulder off the steel highway.

"They came pretty near stopping here all night!" Alex. mused, looking over the ground. "That rock certainly would have stopped them *good*, and, at that, some of the crew might have been taken away on a car door!"

There was no doubt that a terrible wreck would have taken place had the train struck the obstruction while running at full speed. But, because of the steep grade and the heavy train, the momentum had

not been great, and the watchful engineer had seen the rock in time to prevent trouble.

"I wonder how that rock got on the track, in the first place?" the boy muttered. "Doesn't seem as if it could have fallen from that summit. If it had, it would have been broken into bits."

"I just believe some one put it there," was the conclusion, as he examined the ground. "I reckon some rough neck wanted to tip the train off the track!"

This conclusion, hastily formed though it was, led to other insistent questions. If the boulder had indeed been placed on the track by human hands, where were the ruffians who had done it? Had they hidden in some of the cars, or "on the rods," and gone on with the train? Were they still in that vicinity?

"I think I'd better be getting back to the boat," the boy muttered, a vision of bandits and train-robbers peering out at him from the rocks presenting itself. "If there are any Jessie James persons about here, we boys would better keep together."

Alex. gave a parting poke at the great rock and turned around to look over the country to north and south. There was little to see. On each side of the

tracks loomed a wall of rock. But, a short distance to the east, the right of way curved off to the south, following a ledge of rock which led downward. Straight ahead there was a dip, the earth falling away from the tracks and exposing a vista of wild canyons and rugged and forbidding crags.

As the lad turned he saw a red gleam in the canyon straight ahead. It was not the glow of the sunset. It was too late for that. Besides, the canyon was considerably lower than the floor of the pass, so the latest rays of the sun would not have reached it at all. The landscape darkened as he looked, and directly he saw leaping flames and figures passing to and fro in front of the blaze.

"That accounts for the obstruction on the track, all right!" Alex. decided. "I guess we've gotten into a nest of thieves!"

"Well, you needn't tell them what you're thinking about!"

Alex. turned quickly about, not at first recognizing the voice, then a white body launched against his breast, nearly bringing him to the earth.

"Down, Captain Joe!" he exclaimed. "Do you want to tip a fellow off his feet?"

Then he looked up at Clay with a grin.

"I thought you were a train robber!" he said.
"Wonder you wouldn't scare a fellow to death!"

"Why don't you come up to supper?" asked Clay.

"Huh!" replied the lad. "Never you mind supper! Just come along with me and see what I have found!"

"Gold?" asked Clay.

"Train robbers."

"You'll be finding red lions next!" laughed Clay.
"Come on back to the boat. I left Case alone, of course, to come after you, and there's some one prowling around."

Alex. emitted a low whistle.

"That's one of my train robbers, then," he said.
"I've got a trained band of 'em over in the next canyon."

The boy pointed to the smouldering glow straight to the east.

"Hunters, probably," Clay suggested.

"Hunters, of course," Alex. replied, "but they're hunting something besides wild animals."

"If I had your imagination, I'd be writing fiction for the magazines," Clay answered. "Why do you call them train robbers?"

"Because they tried to throw that freight from the track—the freight that just passed. The trainmen had to roll a rock off the track. That's what the stop was for."

It was now Clay's turn to express amazement by a low whistle.

"But why should they want to throw a freight off the track?" he asked in a moment. "There's nothing nourishing in the looting of a freight. Suppose we go over and see who they are?"

"Well," Alex. replied, "I'll go if you think best, but I'll tell you this first. That freight was running on the time of a passenger. See? Oh, they're train robbers, all right, and if there is any one prowling around the boat it is one of the bunch. You may be sure of that!"

Captain Joe now moved away from the boys and approached the lip of the canyon, where he paused and expressed disapproval of the men outlined against the fire by a series of savage growls.

"Come away, Captain Joe!" ordered Clay.

The dog growled again, but drew away from the canyon.

"We can't take him along with us," Alex. de-

clared. "He would give us dead away. We've got to slip up to the fire and find out what is doing without making our presence known."

"That seems to be the proper way," admitted Clay.

"Go back home, Captain Joe!" ordered Alex. in a whisper.

The dog understood and replied by a wag of a sawed-off tail that he would go if the boys thought it best that he should, but that he wished it understood that he did so under protest.

"Go back to Case!" ordered Clay.

Captain Joe gave one reluctant growl with his face to the canyon and started away.

"He feels just like I used to feel when the big boys sent me out of a ball game at Lincoln park," Clay laughed. "He thinks there is something going on here that he ought to be in with."

When the dog disappeared from view the boys turned to the canyon.

"There's a ridge we can follow," Clay said, pointing, "and it will bring us out some distance to the right of the fire, with a lift of rock between us and our mysterious friends. Be careful, though, for it is getting darker every minute."

"If it wasn't dark," Alex. grunted, "we wouldn't be going into the canyon at all."

The boys made their way as silently as possible down the "hogsback," but, with all their caution, a dislodged stone now and then thundered from under their feet to the bottom of the canyon. However, the wind was still blowing a gale, and they hoped that this would drown the noise of their advance.

It took them a long time to get down to the level of the campfire, which now supplied all the light they had to guide them. There were a few stars visible, but a low-lying mass of clouds was scudding overhead, and these shut out what little light came from above except at rare intervals.

"This doesn't look much like a day on the Columbia!" Alex. declared, blowing warm breath on his half-frozen fingers. "Huh! It is cold enough here to freeze the ears off a brass cat!"

"If the *Rambler* could talk," Clay said, falling into the mood of his chum, "she'd be saying things about being taken on a cruise to the top of the Rocky Mountains. Look out, now! The ledge turns here, and straight ahead is a drop of a thousand feet, I guess, from the time it takes to bring the sound of a rolling stone back to us."

The adventurous lads turned with the ledge, crawling now on hands and feet and keeping close to a ridge which formed the summit of the long crag. Presently they came to a rock which blocked their way.

The campfire was just beyond the rock, so they did not attempt to pass around the obstruction. They nestled down in the shelter of the boulder for a time and listened, but the wind was so strong that it carried any words which might have been spoken at the fire off to the east.

In moving about Clay bumped his face against a hard substance under Alex.'s coat.

"Say," he asked, rubbing his nose, "what kind of an infernal machine have you got under there? Are you trying to carry away a piece of the mountain? Or just blow it up? You nearly broke my face."

Alex. clapped his hand to his side and Clay could feel him chuckling, his body shaking with suppressed mirth.

"I've got the big idea!" Alex. said, then. "That's my dandy kodak you bunted into! Had it with me, taking pictures, to-day, and forgot to leave it in our luxurious private car. Lucky, eh?"

"I don't see any luck in it for me," grumbled Clay, still nursing his nose. "Why don't you keep out of the way when you go about armed like that?"

Alex. chuckled again and moved around the angle of the rock, toward the fire. Clay seized him by the foot and held him back, squirming.

"You'll find out if they are train robbers if you go fooling around there," he said. "What fool thing are you trying to do?"

"Leave go of my foot!" exclaimed Alex., kicking like a mule. "I'm going to get a snapshot for my private collection."

"You may get a shot that won't be much of a snap," Clay replied, in better humor. "Can you get by the angle of the rock far enough to do the trick? I'd like a copy of that photograph myself."

"Of course I can," was the reply. "I can see four men at the fire now, and they are all set for a good picture. Wait a minute!" he added. "One of them is going to throw a lot of brush on the blaze. I'll show you a peach of a flashlight effect before long."

The boy edged farther along, and Clay heard him snickering as he brought out the kodak and waited

for the right moment to come. Clay became impatient, presently, and advanced toward him.

“Get back!” Alex. whispered, almost in his ear, as he pushed against him. “I had eight films in and I’ve used ’em all. And there’s a giant of a man coming out this way. Get back! Take a tumble in some hole in the ground! I guess he saw me!”

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW FACE ON THE RAMBLER.

WHEN the prow lamp of the *Rambler*, in response to the turning of the switch by the excited boy, flared out, Case saw a slender figure standing close to the cabin door, which was closed. The lad's first impulse was to fire at the intruder, but the figure looked so shrinking, so lacking in aggressiveness, the face showing under a man's slouch hat was so white, so appealing, that he lowered his weapon and called out:

"What are you doing here?"

There was no verbal answer, but the boy, for such the intruder appeared to be, began slowly backing away, toward the railing of the boat.

"Stand where you are!" ordered Case, presenting his weapon again. "I want to know something about this. Look up here!"

The other's eyes, shrinking and afraid, looked for a moment into those above the threatening revolver and then dropped.

"Where did you come from?" was the next question. "What are you doing on board the *Rambler*? Why do you come sneaking up?"

Case thought he saw a quick start at the mention of the name of the boat, but still there was no reply.

"Oh, come on!" Case advised, in a kinder tone, "you'd better talk. I shall not hurt you. Did you get off that freight?"

Case had lowered his arm while speaking, and the intruder took advantage of the fact. He leaped backward, over the railing, to the floor of the car and jumped to the ground. It was all done so quickly that Case had no time to prevent the escape, and that would doubtless have been the last of the boy, so far as he was concerned, if a strange and unexpected element had not intruded into the case.

When Case stepped forward to the railing of the deck and looked down, he heard a cry of fright and saw a white figure and a brown one tumbling about on the ground.

"Let go—let go!" came a voice from out the entanglement.

This was followed by a snarling growl in which Case recognized the deep-chested voice of Captain Joe.

"Here!" the boy called out to the dog. "Let up, Captain Joe! Watch him, old fellow, but don't eat him up!"

The dog separated himself from the tangle and sat up, his wrinkled nose, his twitching ears and jerking tail, apparently following every movement of his late antagonist.

"Did he bite you?" asked Case, hastening down to where the boy lay, not daring to make a move.

"I—I don't know," was the pitiful reply. "I think he tore my clothes, though."

"Lucky he didn't tear your throat," Case commented. "Get up and come into the cabin. I want to know who you are, and why you are here. Keep away, Captain Joe!"

The dog did not seem pleased with the idea of transferring his prisoner to the custody of another, but he mounted slowly to the deck of the motor boat and sat gloomily watching the two until the cabin door closed against him.

"Well, that's a nice way to thank a fellow!" his eyes seemed to say, as he turned an ear to the east in response to the beating of wheels on the upward grade.

There was another train coming, and Case opened the cabin door and looked out. Captain Joe greeted him with a dignity which was at once a promise of forgiveness and a reminder of previous discourteous treatment.

Case listened an instant and turned his face back into the cabin.

"I'm going out now," he said to the captive inside, "but I'm leaving the dog on guard. He'll eat you up if you try to get away."

With this cheerful remark he turned from the cabin and listened to the steady roar of the approaching train.

"If you are hungry," he called back, already moving away and leaving the door open so that the watchful dog might be seen from the interior, "there are cold pancakes and bacon on the table, and coffee on the stove. We got supper a long time ago, but this has been our busy night, so we haven't eaten yet."

There was an instantaneous rattling of dishes and Case smiled as he peered through the open door.

The prisoner was eating as if he had not seen food before in a long time.

"Go to it!" laughed Case. "You're welcome. And, say, if you know anything about electric stoves, you might warm up that coffee. Or perhaps you can do it quicker on top of the coal stove, if the fire hasn't gone out."

The headlight of the on-coming train was now in the pass, lighting the rails until they glistened again, bringing the platform car and the boat set rakishly upon it out in bold relief. And just in front of the engine, running at full speed along the ends of the ties, was Clay. Alex. could be seen clinging to one of the cab steps, with the fireman threatening him with a shovel of coal.

Much to Case's delight, the engine drew up in front of the side-tracked car, and the conductor came running down from the caboose, swinging a lantern in his hand. He threw a volley of ugly words at Alex. and stepped up to where Case stood, leaning over the railing of the *Rambler*.

"Does that kid belong with you?" he demanded, flinging his lantern out in the direction of Alex. "He might have been killed, making a catch like that. Where is the boss of this outfit?"

"We are all bosses," replied Case, not at all pleased with the abrupt manners of the conductor.

"Humph! A mess of boys! Well, get a move on, here, and let us hitch you on. We've lost time enough now."

"You needn't lose any more on our account," Case replied, provokingly. "Get busy just as soon as you like. In other words, 'Fire, Gridley, as soon as you are ready,' " he added, with a grin, repeating the words of Dewey at Manila bay.

"I'd like to have the firing of you!" exclaimed the exasperated conductor. "Here, boys," he added, addressing a group of men who came up from the caboose, "get the jacks under the car and put in two new wheels. We've got to haul her down to Donald."

There was then a great flashing of lanterns, a clashing of tongues, and a groaning of steel screws as the jacks lifted the rear end of the car high in the air. Clay and Alex. dived into the cabin to straighten out possible entanglements there and were amased at coming upon a slender stranger busy at the the pancake griddle. They both stopped in the middle of the room, which was not a very large one, and looked the questions they were too breathless to ask.

"I was told to warm up the coffee," the boy said, "and I thought I'd cook some more cakes. I've eaten all you cooked for supper, and all the bacon, too. I was hungry."

"I should say so," Alex. responded. "There was enough cakes for six harvest hands."

"I'm sorry," the slender boy said, apologetically, "and I'll make it right."

"Forget it!" cried Alex. "It is right now."

Outside the trainmen were letting the axle, clothed with new wheels, down on the track, which they did with a spiteful bump. For an instant all three boys lost their footing and came together with a dash which nearly threw them to the floor. The incident brought them closer together, socially as well as physically, and they were making friends fast when the car was hauled out on the main line.

"You're a new one on me," Alex. was saying when the conductor gave the signal and the train went rattling off toward the Pacific ocean.

When the car was well under way Clay and the others began asking questions of each other and of the stranger, who seemed nervous and anxious to get away—eager to leave the boat, yet longing to remain!

"Where did you come from?" asked Clay, after the boys were gathered about the table for the delayed supper. "Queer thing, your lighting down on us here, at the summit of the Rocky mountains. Do you belong to the gang over there by the camp-fire?"

The lad gave a quick start of surprise and shook his head.

"When did you get here?" asked Alex. "Was it you prowling around the car just after sunset?"

The boy nodded, but did not answer the first question by saying when he had reached that locality.

"How did you get here?" put in Case. "I don't think you've walked to the great divide."

"Why, I came on that train," was the reply.

The stranger did not say which train, but the boys took it for granted that he referred to the freight train which had been held up by the boulder blocking the way.

"Why didn't you go to the campfire instead of coming to the boat?" asked Clay, suspiciously. "It was nearer to the fire, and you must have seen it, for the train stopped near the ridge that leads to it."

"I was over there," replied the boy, hesitatingly, "but I didn't like the appearance of things, so I came on and happened on your car."

"What is your notion of those men at the fire?" asked Clay.

"I think they may be outlaws."

"Just what I think!" Alex. shouted. "Clay thinks they are hunters, but he's weak-minded sometimes! What makes you think they are outlaws?" he continued, determined to have his own impression of the men sustained by an eye-witness.

"Because I heard some talk about fleeing from justice."

"There!" cried Alex., nudging Clay. "Now will you be good? I'm glad we got out of that locality just as we did, for I believe some one saw me taking a snapshot and followed us."

"I think you are dreaming," Clay laughed, but the stranger gave a startled glance about and crouched closer in the corner where he sat.

The boys noted his shrinking attitude and looked at each other significantly. Just why he should show terror at the mention of the men in camp was a matter which they would, they thought, inquire into later.

"When you get done talking to each other," Case put in, sourly, "you might tell me something about the campfire and the men you took a snapshot at and got chased for your pains."

Then Clay told the story and Alex. added amusing frills by telling how Clay had tried to pull him back by the legs so he couldn't take the snapshots he wanted.

"But I got the pictures," the boy laughed, "just the same—eight of them. One of the fellows was continually throwing mountain grass or some other light stuff on the fire, and it was as good as a flashlight."

"Will you let me see the pictures?" asked the stranger, showing great interest in the recital.

"You'll have to wait until I get them in shape," Alex. laughed. "I don't propose to take chances by having them out now. Would you know the men at the fire if you saw them again?"

"I'm not sure," was the reply.

"What were you doing on the freight train?" asked Case, abruptly.

"Just stealing a ride," was the slow, bashful reply.

"You got off here when it stopped?" asked Clay.

"It was still in motion when I got off."

"Where did you come from—where is your home?"

This from Clay, who had been studying the boy's face curiously for some moments. "What city did you live in last?"

"Chicago," was the hesitating reply.

"What's your name?" asked Case, as Clay turned his face away with a quiet smile. "Why don't you open up and tell us all about yourself?"

"There is nothing to tell," was the grave reply. "I'm just a boy tramp, I guess. But I'd like to have you answer a question," he added, with a flush on his pale face. "I'd like to know if it was one of the men from the campfire who followed you, or—or some one else."

"Was there some one else in there?" asked Clay. "You said you went there before you visited the *Rambler*. "Do you think there were men there whom we did not see at the fire?"

"I thought there were men near the campfire who did not belong there," was the reply. "They looked so fierce that I was afraid and ran away. I thought, perhaps, that you might have been followed by one of the men I saw hanging about there—not by one of the campers."

"Another mystery!" laughed Alex. "On the trip to the Amazon we picked up a mysterious boy, and here, presto! we have another. But this boy seems to know what he's talking about, and the other one didn't. At least, he wouldn't let us know that he did

for a long time. Whew! I'd have climbed up a star-beam if I'd 'a' known there were two gangs in the rocks. One was enough for me!"

The conductor now came climbing back over the train to the platform car, swinging his lantern spitefully. Clay opened the cabin door and stood waiting for him to come up, waiting with a sense of impending trouble.

The conductor leaped lightly to the deck of the boat from the platform of the car and stood holding his lantern up on a level with his eyes in order that he might see better. Clay switched on the prow light and stood watching him alertly.

Presently the conductor, now reinforced by a husky brakeman, stepped squarely in front of Clay and flashed a pair of angry eyes at him.

"Stand out of the way!" he commanded. "I want to look inside!"

Clay stood stupidly staring for a moment and then stepped out of the doorway.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT TOOK PLACE ON THE TRAIN.

THERE was no need for the conductor to hold his lantern aloft now, so he set it down on the deck and glared into the cabin. The husky brakeman crowded close to him, peering into the interior over his broad shoulder, a cynical smile on his grimy face.

The conductor seemed disappointed at the result of his inspection of the cabin. He gave a grunt and a shrug of the shoulders and turned to Clay, who stood watching him with apprehension in his eyes.

"Where are the others?" he demanded, in an accusing tone of voice.

"We are all here," replied Clay, doing his best to keep control of his temper, for the manner of the railroad official was insulting.

"Only four?" the surly conductor asked, still looking suspiciously around. "These four belong on the boat, do they?"

The strange boy seemed to shiver with cold or fear. But the door of the cabin was open, and the wind sweeping over the moving train was cold and piercing. In a moment the boy turned his face away.

"All belong here—now," replied Clay, motioning for Case, who had an angry answer on his lips, to remain silent. "We all belong."

"Where are the men who got on at the pass?" was the next question.

"This boy got on there," answered Clay. "He needed rest and food, and we took him in. If any one else got on the train at the pass they are not in the boat—have no right here."

"Humph!" growled the conductor. "This brakeman says he saw two rough-looking men swing on the train as it got under way and move back toward the platform car. Your bill calls for only three passengers to go with the boat, and I'm not going to have a gang of toughs loaded onto me. There's been too many holdups in this section now."

"We are going to Donald," Clay replied, still keeping control of his rather unruly temper, "and we'll pay the boy's fare to that point, if you think we ought to. We are not trying to sneak an extra

passenger in on you. The coming of the boy was accidental, as you have been told."

"I didn't come here to collect fares," shouted the conductor. "I came back here to spot a couple of bruisers who headed for this car. If I find them they'll hit the grit mighty sudden. Understand that?"

"Go as far as you like," Clay smiled. "We have no interest in any men who might have taken your train at the pass. Shall I pay for the boy's ride to Donald?" he added, putting his hand into a pocket.

"I'll take the money for his fare, but I'll throw the others off, just the same," exclaimed the conductor. "I believe you know where the others are, and my advice to you is to point them out to me."

"Why are you so particular about finding them in this car?" asked Clay, smoothly, for he knew that the railroad official could make them no end of trouble if he saw fit to do so. "Have you looked through the entire train? Are there no other hiding-places to look over?"

"There was an obstruction placed on the track at the pass," the conductor said, then, in a more conciliatory tone, "and the men who got on my train and started back toward this car are the ones

who did it. It is ten to one that they are up to further mischief."

"But you were going to throw them off," suggested Clay.

"That was a bluff," admitted the other. "I thought you might offer to pay their fare, as you did the boy's. They will go down in irons if I find them."

"I see," Clay rejoined. "Well, I think you are next to your job, and I'm sorry I can't help you. I don't know why the men you speak of should seek refuge in this car, but what you say about their starting back here is probably true. If I see anything of them I'll let you know. By the way," he added, "we have some fine coffee, piping hot. Wouldn't you gentlemen like a cup?"

Case made a sly face at the word "gentlemen," and Captain Joe arose from his rug under one of the shelf-benches and snarled at the heavy shoes of the trainmen. Alex. covered his mouth with one hand to check an outburst of laughter. The conductor stared at the boy and kicked at the dog, as if sensing ridicule, but addressed his conversation to Clay.

"Why, yes," he said, taking in the fragrant odor

of the coffee, "a cup of something hot wouldn't come amiss. We are having coffee in the caboose right soon, but it is a cold night up here."

"You'll be welcome," Clay answered, "and there are pancakes, too, if you like them. The boys can make some in a minute."

The trainmen drank two cups of coffee each and greedily devoured a dozen pancakes, which Alex. hastened to make. Alex. was wishing that the coffee would scorch their throats!

The meal over, the conductor's face took on a friendlier look.

"At Calgary," he said, "we were ordered to load on jacks and extra wheels and pick you up here. News of the breakdown came there by wire just before we started out. At Laggan there was a message waiting for us saying that an attempt had been made to wreck a freight here. The crew had telegraphed from Field, just west of here.

"Well, I naturally got the idea into my head that the breakdown here—or back at the pass, rather—was just a plant, so I was suspicious when I came up. I was told in the message received at Laggan to keep my eyes open for the wreckers, and that is why I was so short with you."

"You acted just as I should under the circumstances," Clay hastened to say, seeing that the conductor was inclined to be friendly and wishing to remain in his good graces. "Now, what shall I pay you for the extra fare to Donald? We don't want to beat the road out of a cent."

"The coffee pays for that," smiled the conductor.

"Let us know if you find the men who jumped the train at the pass," Clay then said. "This boy thinks there are two groups of men back there, at the pass, you know, and is inclined, from appearances, to be afraid of one of them."

The stranger turned frightened eyes toward Clay for only an instant and then faced away again. The conductor saw the look and asked:

"What is this lad's name, and where does he come from?"

"Comes from Chicago," answered Clay. "We haven't learned his name as yet. We have been together only a short time, you know."

"What is it, boy?" asked the trainman, not at all unkindly. "We are sometimes asked to look out for kids who have run away from home to see the world," he added, turning to Clay, "and so I'll

just make a note of this one's name and address. Likely looking lad, eh?" he added.

"My name is Granville," the boy answered, "Chester W. Granville, and I lived in Chicago, in Peck court."

"Humph," the conductor remarked. "Not a very aristocratic place."

"No, sir," responded the boy, turning away again.

"Ever frequent the South Branch?" asked Clay, with a quiet smile.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "I often went over there, for I like to see ships and tugs and launches moving about in the water."

"And motor boats?" asked Clay, with another quiet smile.

"Of course," was the reply. "Motor boats best of all."

The conductor wrote down the name and address in a notebook and got to his feet. Alex. punched Case in the ribs and whispered in his ear:

"Funny name and address, I don't think!"

"Perhaps," Case whispered back, "but I'll bet the lad is all right. Anyway, I've heard that a lie is only a misstatement of fact to a person entitled to know the truth, and his name and address is no

business of the conductor's. I think the con. is just butting in on us to see what he can find out. I don't believe there are any such men as he describes on board—if there are, they never got on at the pass."

"Well, we've got another mystery with us!" grinned Alex., as the trainmen left, swinging lanterns to light the way. "A strange maverick of a boy and two fierce-looking men! We're getting all there is in this drama, all right—red fire and all! If the Columbia river trip makes good with the overland journey, we're in for excitement—and then some. Say, Clay," he continued, "why did you ask Mr. Chester W. Granville if he ever visited the South Branch in Chicago?" with a wink at the boy.

"Why," Clay answered, "it seemed to me that I had seen him somewhere before, when I entered the cabin and found him making pancakes. I had an idea, when he said that he lived in Chicago, that I might have seen him there, but the impression is an indistinct one. It seems to be connected with some other matter which I cannot now bring to mind."

"He ought to remember if he ever saw you before," suggested Alex.

The boy said nothing, and Case and Clay pre-

pared their bunks for a short sleep. They would reach Donald before daylight, and so would have only a short period of rest. The train was running fast over a roadbed none too smooth, but that did not for a second keep them awake.

Alex., and Gran., as the new member of the party was known from that night, sat in the cabin and compared notes regarding life in Chicago for a short time, and then Gran. fell asleep on his bench and Alex. went to the prow of the *Rambler*, now bobbing about under the motion of the train as if it had come back to its own in some wild river, and looked out on the swaying coaches ahead. The moon had arisen, and there was plenty of light at intervals, although the sky was still flecked with clouds.

Field was soon passed, and then the milder grade down to the valley of the Columbia river began. The scene was such as the boy had long hoped some day to see. The snow-capped peaks, the silver of the moonlight on the lower crags, the heavy shadows of the canyons, the long lines of steel binding together the Atlantic and the Pacific! He had heard many tales of daring robberies and bloody feud encounters in that vicinity, and looked upon

every crag and canyon as the possible scene of an outlaw gathering.

Presently he saw a figure running toward him along the tops of the box cars. Now it stooped low, as if fearful of being seen, now it lifted to full height and leaped from roof to roof. When it came nearer the boy saw that it was not the conductor or the brakeman who had visited the cabin some time before.

This was a larger man than either of the trainmen he had seen. The shoulders were broad, denoting great physical strength, and the height was not less than six foot three. Another peculiarity the boy noticed. The arms were unusually long, even for so tall a man. As they swayed away from the body with the motion of the train he saw that the fingers dropped almost to the knees.

The face the boy could not see distinctly. It was covered with a great beard and shaded by the brim of a cowboy hat. Directly another figure, carrying a lantern, appeared on the top of the train. Alex. heard a shout, and then a pistol shot. The tall man in advance halted, limped over to the side of the car, swung down a ladder and disappeared from sight.

The second figure came running up to the car attached to the one on which the *Rambler* lay and shouted across to the boy:

“Where did he go?”

There was much noise and the wind was blowing against his voice, so Alex. could not make the other understand that the fugitive had gone down the side ladder except by pointing. The whole scene had seemed so unreal to the boy that he half expected to see the tall man bob up in the moonlight from some dark canyon and continue his frantic flight over the swaying coaches.

“Guess I got him!” shouted the other, lowering his lantern. “Here’s blood on the roof. There were two of them, and both got away.”

Alex. remembered the conductor’s story of the men who had swung on at the pass, and was not altogether displeased at the thought that they had been chased off the train. In the tall figure which had swayed toward him for a time and then almost dropped, bleeding, from the car top, he thought he had recognized the figure which had pursued him around the angle of rock where the pictures had been taken. Feeling safer, he went to sleep, and when he awoke the car was being detached from the train at Donald.

CHAPTER VI.

MOURNING AN EMPTY KODAK.

THE "private palace car," as the boys called the platform car which had carried the *Rambler* out of Port Arthur, was being shunted from the train to a siding near the river bank, and some one was pulling like mad at Alex.'s arm. He sat up, rubbing his eyes, and struck out at the hand which was annoying him. A chuckle came from the side of his bunk, and he saw Case standing there with a most exasperating grin on his face.

"Get up!" the latter cried. "We'll be afloat on the Columbia in less than no time. Say, kiddo, but you've been sleeping some! Get up!"

"Where is the Columbia?" asked Alex., hardly awake yet.

"Why," laughed Case, "I forgot to take it in last night and so it froze stiff on the roof. The

boys are thawing it out with a flat iron. Where did you think it was, silly?"

"You're all right," Alex. grunted, dressing as fast as his hands could move, "but you have foolish spells. Which way is the Columbia from here? I'm in a hurry to get a look at it. My, but there's a heap of fun coming to us now. Good old river, eh, Case?"

"You know it," replied the other. "Now, wait a minute," he added, as Alex. made a move toward the door. "I came in here to talk with you."

"You near broke my arm," complained Alex. "What is it about? Can't you wait until I get a peek at the river? What's the hurry, anyway?"

Case drew the boy down on the edge of the bunk and held him there a minute until he quit struggling. Outside the boys were standing at the prow of the *Rambler*, watching the car carrying them closer to the dock, if such a primitive contrivance might be called a dock, where the motor boat was to be launched. Glancing out through the glass panel of the door, Alex. saw that Gran., the stranger who had come to them so strangely the night before, was standing in a dejected attitude before Clay, who appeared to be talking earnestly.

“What’s Clay scolding Gran. about?” he asked, then. “Looks like he was giving him a good one. Let me go out and see about it.”

“That’s what I want to talk with you about,” replied Case. “We want your advice, don’t you see. It is about the strange boy.”

“You’ve come to the right shop for sound advice!” laughed Alex. “What is it about the boy that you want to know? I guess you have seen as much of him as I have. I rather like the fellow, but he seems to have something on his mind—something worrying him.”

“There is,” Case went on. “He insists on leaving us here, and won’t give any reason for doing so. He says he has a good reason, and that is all he will say about it.”

“But how is he ever going to get out of this desolate land?” asked the other. “He can’t very well ride on the rods clear to the ocean, and he’ll just about wear his feet out up to his knees if he tries to walk out of the wilderness. I don’t suppose he’s got a cent of money. Say, but do you believe the story he tells about coming to the pass on the train that came near bunting into the boulder?”

“If he did,” Case replied, “he found some reason,

pretty quickly, to get on a scare about the men in the camp, or the men back of the camp."

"He did seem to be scared of his life whenever the fellows were mentioned," admitted Alex. "Do you mind what he asked me? Wanted to know if it was one of the men from the campfire who chased me when I took the snapshots, or whether it was someone else?"

"I remember that," Case answered. "Queer, eh?"

"Now, how did he know about there being someone else around there?" continued Alex. "He must have made a pretty thorough inspection of the place, for we saw no one except the men by the fire. But, say——"

The lad ceased speaking and sat looking at Case in a puzzled way, as if trying to solve a knotty problem which had just come into his head. Case noted the change of attitude and waited for him to go on.

"S-a-a-y," the boy continued, in a minute, "I saw every man at the fire quite distinctly, and there wasn't one there as tall as the man who came after me when I had the camera, or the man who went off the car last night with a bullet in his back, or his side, or somewhere."

Case looked at his chum with questions in his eyes. Then he laughed.

"You've been dreaming again!" he said. "Don't sleep on your back, kid, and you won't have such terrible experiences."

"Have I?" demanded Alex., indignantly. "You just ask the brakeman what he shot at last night, and then go and look at the top of the car. Perhaps you can squeeze blood out of dreams, but I don't believe it."

"Well, why didn't you tell us about it last night?" demanded Case.

"Because I was sleepy. I'm telling you about it now."

It took only a few words to inform Case as to the events of the night before. The boy looked perplexed as he asked:

"Are you sure that was the man who chased you when you were out with your kodak? Say," he went on, without waiting for an answer, "the con. was right about two men swinging on at the pass, wasn't he?"

"Sure he was. Yes, and I'm pretty certain that one was the man who chased me around the rock. I don't know why he should have done it. I didn't

see him until he broke out of the darkness behind the ledge. Queer thing!"

"Did he see you taking a picture, with the snoot of the kodak pointing in his direction?" asked Case, with a smile that provoked Alex.

"Come, now, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," the boy exclaimed, "I suppose you can tell me exactly why he chased me, and what his thoughts were as he shot his long legs through the gloom! How do I know what he saw? I wasn't taking any picture of him."

"How do you know that?" asked the other. "How do you know that he wasn't in view of the kodak? Sometimes you get a picture that you don't know anything about. Where are the pictures you took last night?"

"Haven't taken 'em out yet," Alex. replied. "I'll have to wait until I can get a chance to develop them. There's no hurry, is there?"

"I would just like to see what the pictures include, that's all," answered Case. "There must be some reason for these men chasing us up as they appear to be doing. Don't you think so?"

Alex. opened his eyes in wonder, evidently regarding Case as the originator of a puzzle to which he only could supply a solution.

"Why," he asked, presently, "you don't think the two men got on the train just because we were on it, do you? To my mind, they got on because they didn't like the looks of the ties as a means of transportation. I guess you'll find that that's all there is to it."

"Well," Case replied, "I don't know as I'm right, but it appears to me that there *were* others in the pass besides the campers, and that they had some reason for getting hold of you. I'll just bet you took one of their pictures, perhaps as he was peering out from some shelter, when you snapped the others. And I'll wager you the washing of a mess of dishes that they think you did, whether you did or not."

Alex. laughed silently for a moment and then asked:

"Where did you get it? You're building a mystery about a tramp chasing a boy who came too near his lair! Come, let's go out on the bank and take a look at the Columbia, our future home for many a bright day! We've been guessing over nothing long enough."

"Will you let me see the films?" asked Case, still in dead earnest.

"Sure! Just fish my kodak out of that mess on

the floor and I'll get 'em out. You can see them well enough to learn if there really is any face peering out from some nook behind the fire."

Case found the kodak presently and brought it to Alex., who took it into his hand and opened it. Case saw him looking into the opening where the films ought to be, and then heard a low laugh. He turned quickly to see Alex. tossing the kodak to the bunk.

"Where are the films?" he asked, as Alex. sat down and chuckled.

"Oh, what's the use?" the other asked. "What did you go and take 'em out for? The chances are that you have ruined the whole lot."

It was now Case's turn to express incredulity.

"I don't know what you mean?" he said, picking up the kodak.

"Oh, I reckon you know, all right," grinned Alex.

"But what——"

"Give 'em up!" cried Alex. "You've gone and taken the films out of the kodak! Then you come in here and ask me to let you see 'em! Give 'em up, I say, or I'll be doing something rash!"

The boy was laughing, but still he seemed in earnest. Case sat down on the edge of the bunk and looked through the kodak.

"Where are they?" asked Alex., nudging the other in the ribs. "The joke is getting stale."

"I haven't seen them," was the reply. "I hope you haven't lost them, for a whole lot might depend on having them."

"Honest?" demanded Alex. "Cross your heart?" he added, with another provoking grin. "You don't for a minute think I believe you, do you?"

"You'll have to, for I am telling the truth," was the unexpected answer. "I haven't seen them."

"Will you call Clay in here?" asked Alex., in a moment. "I want to ask him two questions. Don't let Gran. come with him."

Case, understanding what the boy intended doing, went out to the prow and sent Clay in, remaining there with the stranger. When Clay entered the cabin and closed the door he was not a little surprised at the grave manner in which Alex. looked at him.

"Two questions," Alex. said.

"Go on, schoolmaster," laughed Clay. "I'm sure I have my lesson."

"One: Did you take the films from the kodak?"

"I did not," replied Clay, with a shake of the

head, a frown gathering about his eyes. "I did not. What about it? Are they gone?"

"Two: Do you think this Chester W. Granville took them?"

"I do not think him capable of taking anything by stealth," was the quick reply. "But what is this about? Why don't you answer my question? Have the films you took at the campfire last evening been stolen?"

"They're gone," was the answer. "It may be a joke, but they're gone, all right. You say you didn't take 'em, and Case says he didn't, so what is there to think except——"

"I don't believe Gran. took them," Clay hastened to say. "I don't think he is that kind of a boy. Besides, he has had no opportunity, that I can see. He couldn't have taken them in the night without waking some of us. I'm not a heavy sleeper, you know."

"Did you hear the pistol shot in the night?" asked Alex., with a suspicion that Clay had slept sounder than he knew. "Come, now, did you?"

"I did not," was the quick reply. "What time was it?"

"And you say that you would have heard the boy

if he had opened the kodak and taken out the films! Well, they are gone! Either he took them, or some one took them while walking in his sleep, or some one sneaked in during the night and stole them."

"If any outsider had entered the cabin to get them," Clay considered, "he wouldn't have opened the kodak in there and left it. He would have made off the minute he got his hands on it, and opened it somewhere else? Don't you think that is right?"

"Sure I do," replied Alex., the frown on his face growing steadily. "Sure I do. Then, that puts it up to this Chester person, doesn't it?"

"But why should he steal them? Tell me that! And tell me another thing, while your are at it. What was the shooting in the night?"

Alex. again explained, in as few words as possible, just what had taken place in the night. Clay saw more in the occurrence than Case had seen and said so. He was plainly apprehensive of coming trouble.

"I really believe those fellows were following us," he said, presently. "And I believe the photographs have something to do with it. Well, that may supply us with a little excitement. Have you been out in the town yet? Something doing all the morning, while you've been sleeping."

"Got up a short time ago," replied Alex. "Now, look here," he went on, soberly, "if Gran. didn't take the films, who did? And, say, if he did, he'll be likely to duck away from us at the first chance."

"He has been trying to leave us now," said Clay. "He was about to jump off the car when I stopped him. He says he has no intention of imposing on us longer! It does look bad! Still, we don't know why he should have taken them. Let's suspend judgment for a time. What?"

"Oh, I haven't convicted him yet," smiled Alex. "Only I want to get a line of the films. That's all. I want 'em. No, Gran. would have no object in taking them unless he was sent here to do that very thing. S-a-a-y, Clay, suppose he was sent to us for that very purpose?"

Clay laughed and moved toward the door, Alex. at his heels.

"He couldn't have been sent for that purpose, for he was at the boat before the pictures were taken," he said.

"Yes, but, since then, he might have received orders from the men. I believe there is something up here. Those men back there may be train robbers. who don't want any pictures taken. Understand?"

Gran. might have come west with them. He might have been sent over to us to get a line on our intentions. Later, he might have been told to steal the films! It is up to him to explain, anyway, but don't be too hard on him. Suppose it should turn out that the men in camp, or the men back of the camp, were really train robbers? That would be awkward for Gran., wouldn't it?"

"It would be awkward for the robbers if a kodak located them on the scene of the robbery last night," Clay replied.

"Last night?" repeated Alex. "What about a robbery last night?"

"The Pacific express was held up just the other side of the pass very early this morning," answered Clay. "The express and mail cars were looted and the passengers robbed. The two men who boarded the train didn't do it, of course, but there were others there in the canyons!"

CHAPTER VII.

PIE THAT LIVED IN A GLASS HOUSE.

"THEN," Alex. suggested, "we'd better be getting the *Rambler* into the water and sailing away. If the officers should decide to hold us as witnesses, we'll have a fine time on the Columbia, I don't think."

"That is just what I have been telling Gran.," replied Clay, "but he seems to think that he ought to part from us here. He says he has no money to share the expense of the trip with us, and that he will not be what they call a star boarder on South Halstead street, Chicago—one who never misses a meal or pays a cent. I like his independence, but I'd like better to have him with us. Suppose you go and talk it over with the lad. He's pretty blue over something this morning."

"Perhaps he wants to get away from us because

he thinks we will be suspected of knowing something about this robbery and followed," suggested Alex., all his suspicions coming to the front once more.

"And perhaps he wants to get away because he knows that we'll suspect him of taking the films. We've just got to keep him with us, for a time, anyway," the boy added. "We'll tie him down if necessary!"

"Well, the very best thing I can suggest at this time," Clay decided, "is to forget the films, and the train robbery, and the way the boy came to us, and go on about having fun with the Columbia river. Doesn't it seem that way to you? To get away is surely the easiest way to escape any trouble connected with the robbery. I'll go and tell Case about it, and we'll just cut everything out but the fun we're going to have on the river."

"All right!" Alex. agreed. "There never was any photographs taken in the pass, and there never was a train robbery at the summit of the Rocky mountains, and no boy ever came to us out of a dark canyon at night! Say but we'll have a lot of forgetting to do!"

"And Gran. is not to know a word of what we have been talking?"

“Not a single, solitary word! Didn’t we agree that there never was any films, and that there never was a robbery, and that Gran. came to us out of the clouds, dressed in red and purple, with his pockets stuffed with treasury notes? Trust me to forget it all when I’m talking with him.”

Clay went forward and drew Case aside, leaving Gran. alone on the prow, and Alex. promptly engaged him in conversation. The stranger was still insisting on leaving the party there, when Captain Joe, who had been running about the car for some moments, uttered a growl and started off on a run toward the cluster of houses nearest the river.

Alex. called him back, but the dog seemed to have discovered a scent by the side of the car that he wanted to follow. While the boys stood talking the car bunted against the upright beam which terminated the siding, and the Columbia river lay glistening not far distant.

“Glorious, eh?” shouted Alex. “Say, but we’re bound to have some great old times on that little rivulet!”

Gran. turned away his face and remained silent. Alex. grinned at this proof that the boy really wanted to go with them. If his inclination lay that

way, a little argument would do the rest, he thought.

"I've got to leave you here," Gran. said, with a sigh.

"No," insisted Alex., "we've been talking it over, and have made up our minds that we can't spare you. There are lots of places, we are told, where it takes four to run the boat. There are rapids and falls which necessitate taking the boat out of the water and making a carry. I don't think you ought to quit us now."

The stranger's face brightened in an instant. Alex. smiled again.

"Oh, if I can be of any use," the boy began, "I'll be glad to go, only I have no money, and I thought——"

"Never mind that," Alex. replied. "You're going with us, all right. Is it a bargain? Sure you won't leave us when we aren't looking?" he added. "We'll need your help, you know, in lots of places."

"Come on, now, and get ready to send the *Rambler* into the water!" cried Clay, springing to the floor of the car and then to the ground. "I wish we could run this car into the river and float the boat off, but that can't be done, so I'll have to go and get

skids and rollers and men to help. While I'm gone, you lads get breakfast ready, and we'll take our last meal in this elegant old private palace car!"

"I suppose we can go over to the store and get a few things to eat?" questioned Alex. "We'll have time for that, won't we?" he added.

"Surely," was the reply. "And have some coffee ready for me when I come back. Perhaps you can get a mess of fish. There's the greatest salmon stream in the world, running along at your feet and making faces at you! But you must hurry up and get the food out of the boxes, all ready to carry down to the boat as soon as she is in the river."

"I'll get the breakfast," Gran. volunteered. "I used to know how to get up a swell dinner out of a cold potato and a sausage. If I've got to go down the river with you, I'll work my passage as cook."

Clay and Case looked up at Alex., who stood grinning.

"It is all right," the boy said. "I showed Gran. that we would need his help, and he is too much of a gentleman to quit us. Get a square meal, now, Gran.," he continued, "and we'll cut out the store and be getting the provisions out of the boxes. I guess we've got enough bacon and condensed milk

here to feed an army for a month," he added, ripping off the cover of a box and poking at the contents.

So Gran. hastened into the cabin, from which the agreeable odor of frying bacon, bubbling coffee, and browning cakes soon came, making Case and Alex., still working at the boxes, hungrier than ever.

Before Clay returned, the strange boy appeared in the cabin door waving a pancake turner in his hand, a pleasant smile on his face.

The knowledge that he was really welcome to go with the boys and the prospect of making himself useful, had acted like a tonic, and from that moment he was, apparently, as full of life and as ready for any adventure that might come his way as were the others.

At times, however, he seemed sad and depressed, seeking solitude and, while always willing to do his share of the work, refusing to join in the by-play which his friends often indulged in. At such times the boys respected his mood and acted as if they did not notice it at all. From these moods of dejection, however, he soon emerged as bright and, apparently, as merry as the best of them.

"Dinner ready in the private diner!" he cried, swinging his turner at the boys. "The cakes are

hot, the coffee is strong enough to lift the boat, and the bacon is crispy as a winter morning in little old Chicago."

"It takes a cook to praise his own work!" laughed Case.

Clay came in directly, while they were eating, and all agreed that Gran.'s description of his breakfast had been realistic. The men came before long with their skids and rollers, and before noon the *Rambler* was rocking in the waters of the lordly Columbia river.

"Our dream has come true!" Alex. whispered to Clay, as the last load of provisions was deposited on board and the men paid off. "We are at last on the Columbia, hundreds and hundreds of miles from the ocean, with a long ride before us. Isn't it just glorious, old pal?"

"Glorious!" repeated the other. "It is more than glorious, and there never was any pictures taken in the pass, there never was any train robbery there, and Gran. came to us without a suspicion clinging to him."

"Right you are!" Alex. approved, "still, for the last time, mind, I really would like to know what became of those films, and if there were any faces in

the photographs that I did not see in the glow of the fire."

"That is your last guess," laughed Clay. "We are not going to have mysteries tagging after us on this trip, as we had on the voyage up the Amazon. We're going to hunt deer, and bear, and jaguars, and have the time of our lives! And fish! Just wait until we begin to take those big yellow salmon from the river! Just you wait!"

"There's one thing we forgot," Clay observed, as the boys put away the provisions in the odd nooks provided for them and saw that the gasoline tanks were full, the electric generator in good working order. "We never went up to wish that gruff conductor good luck."

"He is a gruff one, all right," Alex. cut in. "He did put on a lot of authority when he first came up to us, didn't he, now?" he continued.

"But he calmed down when we filled him up with cakes and coffee," Case observed. "He didn't turn out so badly, after all. There's many a gruff person in the world who can be quelled by a little courtesy."

"But you wanted to fight with him," laughed Clay. "I saw that by the way you looked at him. That would have spoiled everything."

“Good luck to him, anyway,” Case commented. “He must have squared us in connection with the robbery, for no one here has asked us a word about it. He probably told the natives that we left with him long before the robbery took place at the pass. Don’t you think so?”

“What robbery?” asked Alex., with a giggle. “It has been discovered that there wasn’t any robbery at the pass, and that there never was any—. Well, what’s the use of talking about a thing that never took place. I wonder if Clay brought any pie along in the boxes?”

“Pie in a box—all the way from Chicago!” snorted Case. “You must think they *can* pie up there. But, say, how would a pie go just now?”

“That’s all you know about the haunts and habits of pie!” exclaimed Clay. “In Chicago they have a species of pie that lives in glass. When you want a bite you make a blanket of flaky dough and take it out of the glass can, and then exposure to heat brings it to life in the shape of pie! What do you know about that? Pie that lives in a glass can!”

“Did you catch some of them?” asked Alex., “because if you did I want to see one perform. Which box is he in? Hurry up, and I’ll make the

flaky dough blanket in time for supper. PIE!" he added, lifting his eyes upward in a devotional attitude. "I adore pie!"

"You'll find berry pie, and pumpkin pie, and mince pie, and apple pie sleeping peacefully in one of the boxes," Clay replied, much to the joy of the others, who executed a fancy dance on the deck and then came back to ask more questions about the haunts and habits of pie. Whether it came out in broad daylight, or whether one had to set traps for it and catch it during the dark hours of the night. Clay only laughed and fished out a two-quart can of pumpkin, which he placed tenderly on the table.

"Be careful with him," he smiled. "He will bite if you don't make the dough blanket light and flaky. I have known children to need the care of a physician after being bitten by a bad pie!"

"That will do for you!" Alex. responded. "When we need any one to tell us about the haunts and habits and preferences of pie we'll let you know."

At this latest mention of the word "pie" Captain Joe, who had been sitting gravely on the prow of the motor boat, gave a sharp yelp and came trot-

ting into the cabin, his ears lifted—what there was of them—expectantly, his tail trying to make a great circle in the air with only a couple of inches of stub in sight. The boys laughed heartily.

“Do you recognize the word, Captain Joe?” asked Alex., patting the white bulldog on the head. “I believe you do, you old scamp. Now, what kind of pie would you like for supper, old chap?” he added, talking to the dog as if he understood every word that was said to him—which was a habit the boys all had.

“I don’t think they grow pie where you came from,” Alex. observed, in a moment. “Where do you think this beastie came from, Gran.?” he went on.

“Chicago?” was the brief answer. “He looks like Halstead street.”

“Alex. stole him, or bought him, or abducted him, or shangaied him, at Para, down near the mouth of the Amazon,” Case put in, “and came near getting his head knocked off. Let her go, Clay!”

This last was called out to the boy busy at the motors, and the next moment the voyage had begun. The *Rambler’s* nose was turned down the Columbia!

CHAPTER VIII.

A WRECK AND A BABY BEAR.

DONALD, British Columbia, where the *Rambler* was introduced to the waters of the Columbia river, is pretty well up toward the Arctic circle, about in the same degree of latitude, in fact, as the Great Glacier of the Cascade range, still it is not so cold there in April as one would naturally suppose. There is splendid summer grazing land between the Fraser river, in that latitude, and the Pacific ocean.

Being so far to the North, one would expect the river, like a well-behaved body of water, to run south at Donald, especially as the mouth of the great stream is hundreds of miles in that direction, near the thriving city of Portland, in the state of Oregon. But rivers in mountainous countries have notions of their own, like wayward boys, as to the proper

course to pursue, and so the Columbia pours its waters toward the North Pole for more than a hundred miles beyond Donald.

At Beaver the Canadian Pacific leaves the valley of the Columbia and winds south to cross Dog Tooth mountains, a parallel ridge of the long Rocky mountain system at Glacier House pass, while the Columbia pursues its turbulent way to the northwest for a hundred miles or more, as the river runs, until it rounds a great mountain peak and receives the waters of the Wood and Canoe rivers at Boat Encampment. This is the farthest point north for the Columbia, as the stream turns abruptly to the south there and makes for Arrow lakes.

Between Beaver and Boat Encampment the river valley is narrow, and there are no settlements to speak of. In many places the two ridges of the Rocky mountains press down to the waters of the river. The country is wild, and in April the summits to the east and west show snowy caps, like stalwart nurses out in the city parks, guarding perambulators and leading toddling youngsters.

The *Rambler* passed Beaver long before sunset and entered the wild region between the crowding mountain ridges. It was dim and uncanny there

long before it was time for the sun to withdraw his face from that part of the world for the day, as the western summits shut out much of the light that fell. The three lads, Clay, Case, and Alex., who had visited the wild places of Peru during the Amazon trip, were wild with joy at coming back to the heart of Nature, but Gran., who was evidently taking his first degree in the wonderful order of Mountain, Life, did not take so readily to the dark shadows and the swirling eddies which threatened to tear the *Rambler* into bits in punishment for her intrusion into the secret places.

When it became too dark to see the river for any distance ahead, the boys anchored in a little cove cut out of the foot of a mountain by the beating of waters, covering hundreds of years, and built a roaring fire in the coal stove. As it might be some days before they would be able to secure more gasoline, the motors were shut off, together with the electric generators, and supper was started on the top of the coal stove.

There was plenty of electricity in the accumulators, but the lads thought best to use only the electric lights. Clay gave his attention to the work of cleaning the motors, while Gran. led in the prep-

arations for supper. The boys were hungry and tired, and were promising themselves a sound night's sleep as the supper cooked on top of the little coal heater.

"Bacon and pancakes!" scorned Alex., after a time. "I'm getting sick of bacon and pancakes! What's the matter with having one of the pies out of the cage? I'm hungry for pie! Pumpkin pie! Ouch!"

"I suppose you know how to bake a pie on top of a stove!" commented Case. "Why don't you go out and catch a fish, if you are so keen for something new for supper. There ought to be plenty of fish in this roaring old river. Get the rowboat out and I'll go with you."

"All right," agreed Alex., "we haven't used the rowboat yet on this trip, and we'll see how she behaves in the Columbia. Untie her, and I'll get in and take the oars. Be careful now, and don't jump in like a barrel of bones. This current is treacherous! If we get a dip here it may be a long time before we see sunlight again. Careful, now!"

"I don't think you boys ought to go out in the rowboat," Clay warned. "Why don't you fish from the *Rambler*, or wait until to-morrow for your feast?"

It is too risky, just at night, and in unknown waters."

But Alex. was already in the rowboat, which was pulling hard at the line in Case's hands. The boy backed with the oars, and Clay helped Case on the line, but when the latter was ready to jump for the boat the line parted and Alex. went swirling down the river at the rate of a score of miles an hour. The boys stood aghast for an instant, and then Case sprang for the motors.

"Wait!" Clay ordered. "You can't turn on power until I put some of the pieces back! I had it unfastened. Don't touch it! I'll see what can be done! Get out your flashlights and guns. We'll let the boy know where we are, at any rate. I'll have this motor ready in a minute."

"Cut the anchor line, then," cried Case. "We can't let Alex. go off in that way. We've just got to follow him! Cast off the anchor!"

The excited lad would have sent the boat adrift in the current, in which case she would have been dashed to pieces on the rocks in a very short time, if Clay had not interfered.

"You must be crazy!" the latter cried. "Alex. may be all right. We will have power on in a min-

ute, and then we can catch him, if we don't bump into a foothill or tumble over a sudden drop. Listen! I thought I heard the boy calling. Answer him, you fog horn! You can beat me when it comes to making a roar."

For an instant there was only the sweep of the dark water against the *Rambler* and the call of birds high up in the sky—so high up that the latest pencils of light from the setting sun touched their wings and turned them into burnished gold. Then a long "Ha-l-o-o" came from down the dark river. In a moment the sound was repeated, louder than before.

"That's Alex!" cried Case. "He's all right somewhere, it seems."

"Yes," Clay agreed, "he must have caught on something, for the current would have carried him beyond hearing long before this. He may have found a rock in the middle of the stream, or a small island. Hope so."

"Hello, hello!" came the voice again. "Can't you send down a light or a gun? I've got into a mess here. Hurry up!"

"Suppose we send Captain Joe down with a string, and a rope tied to the end of the string," sug-

gested Gran. "The dog would swim straight to him, wouldn't he? Then we could pull the boat back and Alex. in it."

"Fine idea!" cried Clay, "especially as the boy doesn't appear to be very far off. Call the dog and I'll get a long rope and a string. If the rope and string aren't long enough to reach Alex., we can pull the dog back. Good chance to make Captain Joe earn his food. What?"

Case rushed into the cabin and looked about for Captain Joe. He was not under foot in the middle of the cabin floor, as he frequently was. He was not on his rug under one of the shelf-benches. He was not in the cabin at all, and Case went out to the deck again, calling softly to the dog.

"He isn't out here," Clay said. "I've found the rope, so hurry up with the dog. He must be around here somewhere. Couldn't have left the boat without our knowing it, could he? Couldn't have deserted us?"

"Well," Case insisted, returning from a search of the boat, "the dog is not here. What do you think of that? Where is he?"

"He was on board not an hour ago," Gran. declared. "I saw him back there by the boat, the row-

boat, I mean. Could he have started out after Alex., do you think? He certainly has gone somewhere."

Clay whistled and called to the dog, but for a long time there was no response. The mystery was, for a moment, baffling, and then it was cleared in a breath.

Captain Joe's voice came from down the river in a succession of deep growls, followed by a different sort of snarling.

"That's Captain Joe, all right," cried Case. "He must have leaped into the river and struck out after Alex. That's it, I guess."

"Never did in the world," Clay insisted. "If he is with Alex., he sprang into the rowboat when no one saw him. That is one of his old tricks, as he wants to be in the limelight most of the time."

"Is that Joe?" called Clay, making a trumpet of his hands and calling at the top of his voice. "Is Joe there with you, Alex.?"

"Sure," came back from below. "He is here, all right, and he's got a baby bear! Can't you let the *Rambler* down a little? I'm shipwrecked on a ledge of rock. River turns here and I bunted into it and caught hold. If you don't take all night to get here, we'll capture the bear. Captain Joe has him by the leg, I guess."

"Do you think he has a bear?" asked Gran., in a tone of disbelief.

"Just like him," Case laughed. "You can't get Alex. into any scrape he can't get out of. If he should fall into a volcano he'd find an ice box there. Oh, you needn't laugh, Gran.! That is just the kind of a boy he is. We thought we had lost him at Para, Brazil, and he came back lugging Captain Joe, and with a mob at his heels. Now he is cast adrift on the Columbia river and finds a baby bear. But the question now is, how is he going to get back to the *Rambler*? I'll bet the rowboat is busted all to flinders!"

"Few of your prophecies of evil have come true lately, Case," laughed Clay, busy with the motors, "so you may as well quit doing the prophet stunt! Now, if you will come here and hold a searchlight under this frame, I'll put this burr on and start the machine."

Case did as requested, and Gran. hastened into the cabin to put the last touches on the bacon which was frying in a skillet at the top of the heater. He even grumbled a little because the supper was being delayed by the accident which had broken the rowboat line.

"Alex.!" called Clay, in a minute, "is it safe for the *Rambler* to come down there? What kind of a ledge is it you and the dog and the bear are on? You might look around, while you are there," he added, with a laugh, "and see if you can find a fish for supper!"

"Oh, come on with the boat!" roared Alex. "I'm getting tired of holding the rowboat, and Captain Joe is worrying the bear to death."

"Have you honestly got a bear?" asked Gran. "What are you going to do with him? He might bite us," he added, thoughtfully.

The boys heard Alex. laughing and so understood that he was in no serious predicament. Captain Joe seemed to be talking confidentially to the bear.

At last the motors were ready, and the *Rambler* dropped cautiously down stream, under full control of the power and the helm. She passed the ledge where Alex. and the dog and the bear were, picking them up with her flashlight as she went by, then pushed slowly up stream again, coming to the ledge with the current against her. At last her prow struck on a rocky bottom, and then she was held against the force of the stream by half power.

What the flashlight revealed was a boy, a white

bulldog, and a bear cub, all in a huddle on a level surface of rock about six feet in length and about half that width. Alex. had evidently been tipped out of the boat when the ledge was struck, but had managed to hang on to the short line, so the boat was safe. Captain Joe was down at the water's edge with his great paws on the back of the baby bear, which was trying its best to get its teeth into action on the dog's leg.

The broken boatline was very short, and so Alex. was pretty close to the water too. When the flashlight illumined the scene the bear cub gave a savage spring and almost passed from under the paws of the dog.

Alex. was heard to laugh and seen to grab at the bear, and then the whole three rolled off into the river and the boat, thus released, swept past the *Rambler* and went bobbing out of sight. No effort was made to stop it, for Alex., and the dog were drifting too, both clinging to the bear!

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAKING OF A CEDAR CANOE.

DROP down! Drop down stream!" Case yelled, excitedly, as Alex., Captain Joe, and the baby bear swept by on the current. "If they get out of sight they'll drown!"

"What's keeping them in view got to do with it?" shouted Gran. "They will drown anyway if we don't hurry and get them out. Let me go in after them. I'm a good swimmer, really I am. Let me go in and get Alex., and Captain Joe can save himself. See there! Alex. is going under. Let go of me!"

The loyal youngster would indeed have leaped into the river if Clay had not caught him. Case was equally unreasonable, and wanted to send the *Rambler* straight over the struggling figures. Clay caught up the long rope which he had prepared to attach to Captain Joe and tied it about his waist. Then he

took another rope and wound it about his neck and shoulders. Case and Gran. looked on in wonder and impatience.

"Now," Clay explained, "I'm going to swing the boat in a wide circle and meet that precious trio as we pass up the stream. When we get almost to them, you, Case, take the helm, and you, Gran., catch on the ends of these lines. Do you both understand, now—are you ready?"

The boat had swung around while the boy was explaining, and Alex., the bear cub, and Captain Joe were clearly revealed, just ahead, in the glare of the strong searchlight. The cub, forgetting all fear of the canine in the greater danger it was in, had climbed half way up on the dog's back, and the dog was swimming for dear life. Alex. had caught an oar as the boat swept away, and was calmly floating, well sustained by the wood.

"S-a-a-y," cried Case, almost choking with laughter when he saw that Alex. was in no immediate danger. "Can you people down there keep that pose while I take a picture of you? That's great! G-r-e-a-t!"

Clay now saw that there was no pressing necessity for him to take a cold bath just then, as Alex.

would be able to catch the line if it could be trailed near enough to him. Later, he thought, some one might have to go in in order to rescue Captain Joe, who was paddling along like a major, with no expressed objections to the load of bear cub he was carrying on his back. Case explained to the others that the only reason the dog did not protest was because he was afraid he would get his mouth full of water if he engaged in any conversation regarding the riparian rights of the bear. Gran. alone looked grave in the emergency.

Presently the line was thrown and Alex. seized it deftly and proceeded hand-over-hand to the side of the boat. Captain Joe made greater efforts, trying to keep to his side, but the current was too strong. Clay dropped the *Rambler* down as the dog fell away, and Alex. instead of mounting to the deck of the boat, caught the dog by the collar and held on to him.

The cub bear did not take so kindly to this, for he snapped at the boy's hand, and Alex. gave him a slight tap on the nose in return.

Case dropped his extra line to Alex., with instructions to tie it to Captain Joe's collar. This was done, not without difficulty, for the dog did not under-

stand what was going on, and the bear cub made it his business to attack the boy, so all three went under water more than once before the feat was accomplished. Then Clay drew on the line and Captain Joe went up serenely with the bear still on his back. The lads on the deck were shouting with laughter, for the dog was now complaining at carrying the cub.

In a moment Alex. grabbed the cub, tucked it, in spite of protests, under one arm, and was assisted, spluttering and dripping, to the deck of the *Rambler*, bear and all. Captain Joe, on his arrival on deck, at once shook water over Clay and then gave his attention to the cub, but the boys drove him off and hustled the baby bear into a warm corner by the heater.

Alex., shivering with cold, soon followed, and the dog, making peace with the bear for the sake of warmth, sat down in front of the stove and regarded the preparations for supper with anxious eyes.

Then Gran. made more hot coffee, and put on more cakes, and opened a can of baked beans, and boiled potatoes, and soon a wonderful supper was on the little table. The bear cub sniffed at the food, but curled up on his rug again. He had probably

been lost from his mother a long time, and had been in the water before Alex. came to him, and was worn out, still he kept a keen eye on the dog.

"How did you come to get him, Alex.?" asked Clay. "Nice bear, eh?"

"He was on the ledge, soaking wet, when the boat struck it," was the reply, "and the impact threw me plumb on top of him. Then Captain Joe took a hand, or paw, rather, in the mess and he became a prisoner of war. You just bet he's a nice bear!"

"If you keep him, and we remain around here long, we'll be apt to receive a call from his mother," Clay predicted. "What are you thinking of doing with him? He'd make quite a nice meal! Bear meat's fine!"

"Eat him!" cried Alex., now clad in dry clothing, "I'd as soon eat Captain Joe! What am I going to do with him? I'm going to keep him, and train him up in the way good bears should go. He's a pipin!"

"That's pretty near slang," Case remarked, "and the boy that uses slang washes dishes. That was the rule during the Amazon trip, and we have adopted it for this excursion," he explained to Gran.

"Don't talk to me about washing anything!"

Alex. cried, with a shiver. "I never want to see water again. My, but it was cold in there."

He paused and looked at the bear reflectively a moment and then arose and felt him over, his advances being received with great discourtesy by the bear, who had received the impression, it appeared, that he was to be manhandled but not invited to supper.

"Let him alone, kid," advised Clay. "You'll get a bite that will make you sit up and take notice that he has something more than white milk teeth if you don't. Where are you going to store this menagerie?"

"Why, he can just run around here like Captain Joe does," was the reply. I was looking him over to see if the dog wounded him, but he appears to be all right. Good dog, that! He knew that I wanted to add this teddy bear to my collection. I'm going to give him to Captain Joe, the sailor man, not the dog, when I get back to Chicago. He'll like him for his own sweet sake. Now, what do bears eat? Who knows?"

"Honey!" chuckled Case. "They rob beehives, I had a picture of one tipping over a hive in my school reader. Why don't you call him honey?"

"No, sir; Teddy is his name," replied Alex. "Come, now, you fellows, tell me what to feed him. Will he eat fish, do you think?"

"The Lincoln park bears eat fish," Gran. answered. "I've seen 'em."

"They are polar bears," Case explained. "The other bears eat bread and nuts and acorns. I've seen the black bears dip their bread in the pool and eat it in that way. Feed him pancakes, just for fun."

So Alex. seized a pancake from the table and held it under the nose of the bear. The cub seemed to take more pleasure in the "just for fun" experiment than the boy did, for he seized the cake and a good share of the hand that held it out to him.

Alex. yelled for him to let go and gave him a cuff on the nose. The skin was not broken on his fingers, but the bear's teeth had made indentations which were a trifle sore. Teddy devoured the pancake greedily and looked about for more. The boys threw him pieces, and he soon became so tame that he would put his paw on their laps and ask for food.

For a few days Captain Joe seemed to resent the intrusion of this new pet, but Alex., so Case declared, explained to the dog that he, himself, had saved the cub's life by riding him on his back, and after that there was peace between the two.

Teddy did indeed like honey, and everything sweet, for more than once he emptied the sugar bowl, and the very next forenoon he consumed half a pumpkin pie which Gran. was saving for dinner. The cook rebuked him for this with a club, and Teddy was more careful after that.

Contrary to expectations, the mother did not make her appearance, and Teddy sailed away the next morning without a formal farewell—and seemed pleased with his new quarters and his new friends. Before many days he became a great pet with all the boys, though he always made unusual protestations of firm friendship to whoever was doing the cooking!

The next morning Alex., none the worse for his wetting, was astir long before the other boys were awake. He had determined, during the night, to make restitution for the rowboat he had lost.

“There’s plenty of cedar trees up here,” he thought, “and if I can find a fallen one just the right size, I can make a canoe that will take the place of the rowboat. Of course,” he mused, “it wasn’t exactly my fault that the boat was lost. The rope broke when Captain Joe made a jump and landed in the prow. Still, if I hadn’t been foolish with

Teddy, the boat never would have broken away from me."

Where the great canyons came down to the water's edge, cutting the precipitous side of the mountains into ridges, there were plenty of cedar trees, and the boy, after softly lifting the anchor and turning the *Rambler* down stream, watched long for a fallen tree of the size he wanted.

It was doubtful if he could bring the boat close up to the shore, for sometimes the land sloped gradually down, and sometimes there were hidden rocks which had tumbled from the mountain side, but he decided to try to do so as soon as he came to a suitable place, a place where there were great trees growing close to the water's edge.

A dozen miles down stream from the spot where the night had been passed, the boy saw that the current, setting against the shore, had cut a cove into a bluff. Certain that the water would be deep at the edge of the drop, he worked the *Rambler* in and was soon overjoyed to see that he could stretch a plank from the railing to a ledge which, being followed to the north, would lead to a canyon of some size, the bottom and sloping sides of which were lined with magnificent cedar trees.

He cast anchor and laid out the plank. Then he turned about to see if any of his chums were awake, but all were sleeping except Captain Joe, who lay with his chin on his paws regarding Teddy, still asleep. Captain Joe seemed to Alex. to be asking the bear why he had presumed to use him for a ferry boat on the previous evening, and the boy laughed heartily at thought of the scene under the flashlight.

He beckoned to the dog, threw a rope around Teddy's neck and fastened it to the railing, thus making sure that he would not escape, and, followed by the dog, stepped over the plank to the ledge, from which he passed to the bottom of the canyon. The morning was sharp with frost, but the atmosphere was clear as crystal. It was like looking into a calm sea of blue, transparent glass to look up at the sky bending over the valley of the Columbia. The breath of the cedars was sweet to the nostrils of the boy, and the songs of the birds were pleasant things to hear.

"This beats Clark street!" Alex. thought, moving about in the canyon in quest of a fallen cedar tree of a size suitable for canoe-making.

A green tree would take too long to fashion into a boat, and one too long on the ground would rot

too soon, so he hunted for a long time before he came upon just what he sought.

An hour later, when Clay, missing the boy and the dog, followed the plank to the ledge and then a column of smoke to the interior of the canyon, he found Alex. sitting on a log watching a serpent of flame running along the upper surface of a fallen cedar tree. The boy had made a trench along the top of the log and poured kerosene into it. Then he had set fire to the oil, and the tree trunk was gradually burning out in the middle. A pail of water sat on the ground near the boy, and as Clay watched he saw him arise and wet the edges of the trench, so that only the center of the log would burn. The flames, reinforced now by dry limbs gathered from the thicket, were already deep down into the heart of the long log. Clay's approach was announced by the dog, and Alex. looked up with a curious look of perplexity on his freckled face.

"What are you doing, kid?" Clay asked, looking about.

"Can't you see," replied the boy, shrugging his shoulders, "that I'm putting the roof on this new ten-story building? What do you think I'm doing? Even Captain Joe knows that, don't you, doggie?"

The dog said he did, in his own way, and Clay sat down by the side of the log.

"Somehow," he said, "it is perfectly natural for people to ask foolish questions. I knew that you were making a canoe, Indian fashion, yet I asked that question. Why didn't you let me help you? You'll have a long job if you wait for that whole log to burn out, and you'll have a long canoe, too."

"When it burns out about twenty feet," Alex. replied, "we'll saw it off at both ends, sharpen it up, dig out the charred wood, and have a canoe that will serve the purpose of the boat I lost. Don't you think so?"

"Of course," replied Clay, "but you needn't think you're going to have all the credit of making this canoe. I'm going to stay right here and keep the fires going while you go to breakfast. The boys are wondering where you are, and Teddy looks as if he had lost his best friend."

"All right," Alex. replied. "I think a little breakfast would come in handy just now. I'll leave Captain Joe to protect you."

"That will be nice!" laughed Clay. "Captain Joe can do it, you may be sure. When you return, bring the big saw and some knives with you. I

guess the chopping knife will be about right to dig the charred wood out with. You needn't hurry, for this fire must burn a long time."

Alex. started away, but turned back with a thoughtful look on his face. Clay smiled, for he thought he knew what was in the mind of the boy.

"Say," Alex. said, almost in a whisper, "you haven't come across the films yet, have you? I'd just like to know where they went to."

"There never were any films," grinned Clay. "You know the bargain. Now, run along to the boat and get your breakfast. No films, remember!"

Alex. hastened away and Clay sat for a long time watching the flames eating into the log, then the dog sprang up with a bristling back and gave warning of some one or something creeping through the trees.

CHAPTER X.

A RABBIT AND A SECRET MEETING.

"WHAT is it, Captain Joe?" Clay asked, as if Captain Joe could turn around and tell him what he saw in the thicket under the cedar trees. "Go slow, old fellow, for it may be a beast you can't handle as easily as you handled the cub. Better keep back until I get out my gun!"

Captain Joe continued to snarl at the thicket, and Clay advanced a few paces and peered under the underbrush which was clinging for fragile support to the floor of the canyon.

He saw a human figure moving about, a tall figure bending low and parting the bushes to look out upon the burning log. The description Alex. had given of the man who had pursued him around the angle of rock at the campfire near the pass at once came to the mind of the boy.

Clay moved away, so that one looking into the space where the log lay would not be able to see him, whistled softly to the dog, and waited. Captain Joe

retreated with a growl of defiance and crouched down at the boy's feet, still keeping his eyes on the thicket straight ahead.

The intruder had evidently not seen nor heard the dog, and had no idea that he was watched, for he pushed the bushes aside and stepped into the opening. There he stood, a figure massive and muscular, looking curiously at the burning log for some moments.

Clay observed that he limped slightly as he walked, and noted, too, that his hands hung almost to his knees when dropped to his sides. The face was masterful and intelligent. The fellow was evidently the same who had been shot by the brakeman on the Canadian Pacific train.

"Now," thought the boy, "how the Old Harry did he get here? And why is he here? It certainly looks as if we had been followed from the pass by this chap."

The more Clay thought of the matter, the firmer became his conviction that the man he saw had twice before appeared in their journey from the Rocky mountains to that point. He might have been one of the campers, or he might have been hidden in the canyon back of the fire.

Gran. had suggested the presence of a party not in view from where Alex. had taken the snapshots. He had given no reason for this supposition, but

Clay had come to the conclusion that it was a correct one.

Clay regretted then that he had not secured more definite information about the train robbery at Donald. He had not even learned whether any one had been arrested charged with the crime.

If the campers had been questioned and released as innocent, then it was certain that others had been in the pass at the time they were enjoying themselves before their fire. The men who had held up the train must have been already on the ground!

But, even then, this man and the companion who had swung onto the train which had towed the *Rambler's* car away might have had no connection with this second party. They might have been merely loungers, waiting for an opportunity of getting out of the mountains without contributing to the treasury of the railroad company.

But why had they followed the *Rambler*? How had they managed to get into the valley of the Columbia ahead of her? Clay took it for granted that the conductor had told the truth, and that there were two on the train. He also accepted as true his impression that the second man was not far away.

There were many questions connected with the appearance of the fellow at that place which Clay could not answer, and so he gave them all up and devoted his whole attention to the intruder and his

movements. The man stared about the little clearing for a minute as if expecting to meet some one there, and then limped out in the direction of the ridge near which the *Rambler* lay.

Captain Joe seemed anxious to interview the fellow and ask him a few questions, but Clay kept close hold of his collar and held him back when he would have bounded forward. The dog resented this, but kept quiet.

The long-armed man followed the canyon to the river front, glanced cautiously up to the spot where the *Rambler* lay, and crouched down in the shelter of a rock, as Clay thought, to wait for definite information regarding the situation on the boat.

Clay, following and watching, saw Case, Alex. and Gran. standing on the deck examining automatic pistols. He could not hear what they were saying, but their gestures indicated that they were thinking of going up on the mountainside to look for game.

The tall watcher seemed to interpret the situation just as Clay did, for he turned away with a shrug of his shoulders and disappeared in the canyon, which parted just below the place where Clay stood, one dip running to the northeast and one to the southeast. He took the one pointing to the southeast, passing near the boat, and was soon lost to view.

Clay made no attempt to follow him. Indeed,

the sudden appearance of the fellow there seemed so unaccountable, so impossible, in fact, that the boy almost doubted the correctness of his eyesight. Still, there was the testimony of Captain Joe, who was more than anxious to follow the fellow, and this was not to be disputed.

The boy resolved not to mention the matter to his chums. It could do no good, and, besides, such a course would prevent a great deal of anxiety on the part of the strange boy, who still shuddered at mention of the pass and the happenings there. Directly Alex. came running up.

"How's the boat-builder by this time?" he asked. "Going along all right, eh?" he added, as he noted the progress made by the fire in the heart of the log. "I've brought the saw and the knives, as you see," he continued, throwing the tools down on the ground, "and we'll have a cedar canoe in about two minutes and a half."

He brushed away a mass of coals and cut sharply into the bottom of the burn with a hatchet. The result of his examination seemed to be entirely satisfactory, for he rolled the log over, tipping out the fire and crushing it out by rolling the log over it.

"The burn is deep enough," he said. "If it had burned a few minutes more it would have weakened the bottom. Now, I'll bring some water from the river, put out the fire inside and begin chopping.

We'll have a canoe we'll be proud of before long. Great idea, what? Do you think you can ride in it after we get it launched?" he added, with a wrinkling nose.

"Of course I can," replied Clay, indignantly. "All you've got to do in order to ride a cedar canoe is to keep your head and your balance."

"There's one more thing you've got to do," Alex. laughed.

"What is it?" asked the other. "Tell me about it, so I'll know!"

"You've got to get used to riding under water about half the time," announced Alex., gravely. "When it tips over you've got to hang to it and wait for the top to come around to the sky again. Do you think you can get used to journeys under water? I think they'll be rather pleasant."

"Where are Case and Gran.?" asked Clay, after they had chopped for an hour at the blackened wood. "I hope they aren't thinking of leaving the boat alone. That will hardly be safe, in this wild place."

"Why," replied the other, "they were talking of going up on the mountain after game for dinner when I left. They think they can shoot."

"One, at least, ought to remain in the boat," Clay suggested. "When we return they may go hunting together if they want to, only I wouldn't advise a long stop in this valley. We'd better be on our way, I think."

"I reckon that's right," Alex. agreed, "for, come to think about it, Gran. was going alone, but I'll go and tell them both to stay on the boat. Have you noticed Captain Joe?" the boy continued, pointing to the dog, now snarling at a thicket farther up the canyon. "He seems to have found something. I'll go and see what it is."

Before Clay could offer objections, the boy was away, chasing along through the brush on the heels of the dog. Presently Clay heard a roar of laughter.

"He's got a rabbit!" Alex. shouted, "and he's making as much fuss as if he had another bear. I guess we'll have some fresh game for dinner now," the boy continued, making his appearance with an animal which looked something like a rabbit, but was larger and evidently more ferocious, for the dog had torn it not a little in making the capture.

"I wonder if it is good to eat?" Clay asked, thankful that it was nothing more than a rabbit, or something akin to the rabbit which Captain Joe had scented out.

He had, as will be understood, feared that the intruder with the long arms had returned to that vicinity. Besides, the capture of the rabbit if such it was, would make a hunting trip, such as Case and Gran. had planned, unnecessary at that time. The boy was overjoyed at the outcome of the in-

cident, and asked Alex. to carry the capture to the boat and talk with the others about eating it, also to warn them against leaving the boat alone, even for a minute.

"I've got a book on natural history," the boy exclaimed, "and I'll look up the pedigree of this beastie. When I get back to the South Branch, I'm going to write a book entitled: 'Wild Animals I Have Never Met Because I Could Run Faster Than They Could.' Don't you think a volume of that character would make a hit in the literary world?"

"Bound in calf, or sheep?" asked Clay, with a broad grin.

"Bound in bear!" explained Alex. "And bound to win!"

"Go on to the boat!" commanded Clay, "and see about having that rabbit cooked for dinner. Then come back here and help me get this canoe into the river. We can finish hewing it out any old time. Just now, I am anxious to be on our way. I don't like this dark valley."

"It certainly is a wild one," Alex. answered as he darted away.

Clay drew a long sigh of relief as the boy disappeared in the direction of the boat. He did not quite like the idea of running away from the man who had three times shown a disposition to pursue

them, still, he believed that the wisest course was to avoid trouble if possible.

He would have given a good deal for information regarding the purpose of the fellow. He would have endeavored, then and there, to have forced a meeting only for the fact that an unsatisfactory conclusion of a struggle might have spoiled their long-planned trip down the Columbia.

Alex. returned, presently, with the information that it was really a large rabbit Captain Joe had caught, and that it was to appear on the dinner table in the shape of a stew. By this time the canoe was taking form, and the boys rolled and pushed it to the river.

Once there, they tied it to a strong line and fastened the line to the *Rambler*. The further work of cutting out the wood could, they planned, be done at any time. Clay was not quite certain that the cedar was in good condition, for the fire had done quick work. He had read that Indians, when they resorted to making this kind of canoes, usually required three or four days in which to hollow out a large log.

When Clay got back on the *Rambler*, he went straight to the cabin and began another hunt for the films. He had always believed that the disappearance of the pictures had been accidental, but now he wanted to make sure that they were not in the cabin.

Somehow, the lost photographs were associated in his mind with the men who, he imagined, had seen the pictures taken. The man he had seen in the canyon was one of these.

While he hunted in every conceivable and inconceivable place, Alex. came in and closed the door behind him. The rabbit stew was simmering on the heater and coffee was bubbling on the electric stove. Alex. busied himself about the latter, as if to account for his being there with the door closed, and looked at Clay with wise eyes.

"I know why you want to get away from here right quick," he said. "I know about the man you saw in the canyon. He was there when I went in after the rabbit, and there was some one with him. Now, who do think it was? Give you three guesses.

"Give it up?" he went on. "Well, it was Mr. Chester W. Granville!"

CHAPTER XI.

ALEX. BECOMES A DETECTIVE.

"It doesn't seem possible!" Clay exclaimed. "What could have Gran. been doing there? Could you hear what they were saying?"

"Not a word," was the reply; "they talked in low tones."

"But I thought Gran. was on the boat."

"Well, he left the boat, alone, just after I did. I saw him go across the plank and pass into the canyon. Then he turned in another direction."

"He was back in the boat when you returned with the rabbit?" asked Clay. "Of course, he must have been. Well, then, he had very little time to visit with that fellow. It is a queer proposition."

"I should say so!" Alex. agreed. "Are you going to say anything to him about it—let him know that we are wise to his doings?"

"I think not," was the slow reply. "If there is something between the boy and these men, the way to find out what it is, is to keep still and sleep with our eyes open. Strange that we should have

a mysterious passenger on this voyage as well as on the one up the Amazon!"

"I hope this one turns out as rich as the other," Alex. grinned.

The breakfast, when finally prepared, was a light one, so the boys had dinner early and then got under way. It was much more convenient cooking when the boat was not trying to turn handsprings in the river. Now and then they came to rapids which any ordinary caution would have warned them to hesitate before entering, but Clay was anxious to get as far away from his pursuer as possible in the shortest time allowable, and so took chances.

In the middle of the afternoon they came to a quiet piece of river some distance above a stretch of rapids, around which the boat would have to be carried. They decided to remain here for the night, making ready during the afternoon and evening to convey the *Rambler* around the falls early in the morning.

Clay was careful to anchor the boat on the west side of the river. They had come a long distance, and if the unwelcome visitor of the morning had indeed succeeded in keeping up with them by taking to the stream in a light boat, he would have to show himself if he passed, or even if he came within a hundreds yards of the *Rambler* during the afternoon.

"Now," said Case, as the boat lay rocking in a small cove, "I'll go and catch a fish and show you how to cook it. Here we've been on the river two days and haven't had a bite of fish yet. That is what I call a burning shame. Do you think I can ride that log of a canoe to the shore? I've got to do my expert cooking under the leafy trees, you see, and so I've got to use the canoe."

"You might try it," Clay laughed. "Alex. went after fish last evening and caught a bear, so there is no knowing what you may get."

"Perhaps an elephant!" laughed Gran.

"Or a bold train robber!" Alex. put in, just to see what Gran. would say at the mention of the incidents at the pass.

Gran. looked up quickly, but there was no surprise in his face. Instead he smiled and pointed to a grove of tall cedars on the shore not far from the edge of the stream.

"That looks like a fine place to fish for train robbers," he said. "I have a great mind to go ashore with you to see you get the fish, and help cook it. I know something about cooking fish!"

"Wait until he gets his fish," Alex. said. "When he comes up with a corker, big enough for all of us, I'll help him cook it. I used to cook in the South Branch until the policeman on the beat came to the cabin and asked for my pies and things. You know I did, eh, Clay?"

"Yes," replied Clay, gravely, "you used to cook so well that the policeman got the habit of asking who cooked the coffee before he tasted it. If you made it, he had business outside right away."

"You're having another dream!" shouted Alex. "If you think I can't cook, just watch me serve the cold beans to-night."

"That is where you shine," laughed Alex., "serving cold beans!"

During this conversation Case had been getting out his fishing tackle and leading the canoe around to the side of the *Rambler* nearest the shore.

"Are you going with him?" asked Clay, of Gran., hoping to receive an affirmative reply, for he had decided to follow the lad if he went into the forest alone.

He was not taking to this role of a spy kindly, for it was with many twinges of conscience that he had made up his mind to keep a close watch on the boy.

"I think I'll go," Gran., in a moment, answered. "I want to see the big woods. While Case is cooking his fish on the bank, I can do some hunting. Another rabbit stew would be about right. I always liked rabbit stew! We'll need it, too, if Case doesn't catch any fish."

"Don't you worry about that," Case broke in. "I'm the one that put the salmon in the Columbia river."

"How are you both going to get ashore in that canoe—only half finished as it is?" asked Clay, presently, as Gran. brought his gun and one of the searchlights from the cabin. "You can't swim there, very well, for the water is too cold for pleasure, as Alex. discovered not long ago. I don't think two can ride in that contraption at the same time," he added.

Alex. scratched his head. It was plain to Clay that the boy was on the same line of thought as himself. He, too, wanted Gran. to go ashore so that he might be followed.

How was it to be arranged so that the canoe could be brought back to the *Rambler* after each boy had landed? Then the boy laughed softly to himself, wondering that he had ever given the matter a second thought.

"I'll tell you!" he cried. "I'll tie a long rope to the canoe, and when Case gets ashore I'll pull it back. Then, when Gran. gets ashore, I'll pull it back again, so there will be no chance for any one to steal it."

"Great head, Alex.!" grinned Case, dropping off into the canoe and tying a longer and stronger line to the prow, in order that it might be drawn back to take Gran. to the shore. "You'll be president of some small country town yet. Now, don't pull on that line, young man," he continued, as the rope slipped through Clay's fingers. "Just let her play

out easily, and I'll have no trouble with the old scow!"

He paddled to the shore easily enough, landing on a little sandy spot where hundreds of years of wash of water from the hills had ground soft rock to bits. Back of him ran the forest of cedar, and back of that the western ridges of the Rocky mountains.

"Pull her back, now!" he cried, taking his fishing tackle out of the canoe, "and have Gran. bring some matches. I forgot it."

"Where are you going to get your fish?" mocked Alex. "There are no fishes along that shallow shore."

"Never you mind about that!" answered Clay. "See that pool just below the rock? Well, there is a big one in there that I'm going to have for supper. When I get him caught, you can come and help get his feathers off, Alex."

"All right," Alex. answered, pulling the rude canoe back, very glad of the suggestion that he go ashore with the boys, "I'll be there watching you when you haul him out."

Gran. now entered the canoe and paddled ashore. The new canoe was not much of a craft. It was just a cedar log on the outside and a black trough on the inside. Still, the boys figured that it would save them many a wetting, for there were places

shrewd smile on his face, and Alex. knew just what that smile meant.

"Do you think he'll meet our Robin Hood friend again?" Clay asked.

"I think he wants to meet some one," was the reply. "He never went ashore just to hunt. Who's to go after him?"

"Perhaps you would better go," Clay answered, reluctantly, for he was aching for a turn in the woods. "He'll not suspect you of anything more than a trick if he sees you following him."

"What did he take that searchlight for?" asked Alex.

"I can't answer any questions about the boy," Clay replied, with an expressive shrug of the shoulders. "He appears innocent, loyal, and honest, but he is mixed up in some game which I believe him to be playing under compulsion. You see if it doesn't come out that way."

"While I'm away," Alex. went on, "you might take another look for the films. It is quite important that we get them."

"And when we do," Clay interrupted, "what do you think we will find there? Just give a guess about it!"

"Unless I'm mistaken," the other replied, "we'll find a picture of a tall man with long arms peering out of a canyon back of a campfire."

"Just my notion! But who is this tall man with long arms, and why does Gran. meet him in the forest, and say nothing to us about it? If he is in trouble, why doesn't he put it up to us to help him?"

"Well, well, well," chuckled Alex., "here we stand talking about films that never existed, about a campfire that never was, about a pass never on any map, about a pursuer who never lived! And over there on the shore Case is building a big fire. Now, Clay, just remember that there never were any films! We're not going to have this trip spoiled with any mystery! What is Case building his fire for before he catches a fish?"

"He'll probably dig a hole in the ground, fill it full of hot rocks, and make a regular oven of it, before he gets the fish. Then, when he has the bird, fresh from the river, he'll heat up the rocks again, wrap the fish in leaves and put it into the oven, with hot rocks on top of it and under it, and cover the whole outfit up with leaves and earth."

"Is that the way to bake fish in the woods?"

"That surely is the way," answered Clay. "Now, you see, Gran. has gone into the forest. Perhaps you'd better be getting ashore."

"I just don't like this sleuthing business a little bit!" the boy grumbled, as they drew the canoe back to the *Rambler*.

"It seems to be necessary," Clay replied. "If we

are ever to acquit Gran., in our minds, of all crookedness, we've got to know the truth, and the only way to learn the truth, it seems to me, is to find it out for ourselves."

"That's just it!" Alex. agreed. "If this was to be done to get the kid into trouble I wouldn't be mixed up in it, but as it is to get him out of trouble, I'll go to the limit."

Alex. paddles off to the shore, which was not very far away, and Clay saw him stop for a moment and talk with Case then dive into the forest. By this time the sunshine had left the valley of the Columbia. Away over to the west, beyond the ridges, it would shine on the broken country—on a new world in the making—for an hour or more, but here its rays were stopped by the peaks which shone, white and still, above the cedars.

Clay sat for a long time, watching Case angling for the "big one," he had mentioned, and listening to the call of birds high up in the air. Like all feathered things they were abandoning the lower levels and sweeping in swinging circles up into the sky to catch the latest rays of the sinking sun. Their wings glistened golden in the light and their musical voices came down soothingly.

Case caught his fish, after a time, and proceeded to heat more pieces of broken rock for his primitive oven. Clay sat watching him piling embers on the

mound after he had filled it with leaves and earth. It was growing dark there now, and no hint of the return of Gran. or Alex. had come. Finally Case called from the shore :

“ I’m going to bring this fish over to the *Rambler* directly. “ Have you got the coffee and potatoes ready.

No, Clay had not once thought of the coffee and potatoes, he had been so busy watching Case and thinking of what might be taking place in the forest.

He hastened to the cabin, built up a great fire in the heater, set a kettle of potatoes over, switched on the electric stove, put the coffee-pot on, and then turned to the little table.

Captain Joe, who had been asleep when Alex. left, which accounted for his being there at all, lay on the floor playing with Teddy. The two had already become firm friends.

The sight of the dog brought a notion to Clay’s mind. Why not send Captain Joe into the forest to look the boys up? He would do it, if told to, and would be sure to come back if he failed to find them.

“ Here, Captain Joe,” the boy said, “ don’t you want to go and find Alex.? Put on your hunting shoes and go find Alex.”

Captain Joe sprang to his feet instantly, tumbling Teddy over in a heap as he did so and, advancing

to the deck railing, looked over to the woods. Clay took one of Alex.'s shoes and one of Gran.'s handkerchiefs into his hands and let Captain Joe sniff at them.

"Now you know whom to look after," he grinned at the intelligent dog, "and won't go loafing around Case, even if he is cooking supper."

Clay got the dog into the canoe, though it was a wonder, more than once during the operation, that it didn't tip over, and, taking up the paddle, started for the shore.

Case saw him coming and ran toward the shore to meet him. Captain Joe arose to get foothold for a spring, and the canoe went over, landing both the boy and the dog in twenty feet of water. It did not take them long to get to the shore, where Captain Joe cleared himself of water by a few vigorous shakes and Clay threw off his outer clothing to dry them by the fire.

"You're a fine dog!" grumbled Clay, as he stood before the blaze of dry cedar branches. "I give you a chance to have a run on shore, and you go and give me a ducking in the river!"

CHAPTER XII.

A BEAR, A FISH, AND A TREE.

CAPTAIN JOE, in his best manner, offered the most abject apologies for his conduct, and ended by rubbing his wet muzzle against the boy's hand and receiving a forgiving pat on the head.

"If you'll look after the boat, a little while," Clay said, shivering, "I'll go out with the dog and look for the boys. There may be something wrong with them. They should have returned an hour ago."

"If they don't get back right soon," Case remarked, "they won't get any fish. The oven was hot when I put that big one in, and it won't be long before supper will be ready."

"I'm uneasy about them," Clay admitted.

"Then you go back to the boat," Case advised, "and let me look after the kids. You're shivering with cold! I'll take Captain Joe with me, and we'll dig 'em out in no time. Then we'll bring the fish on board and have a feast. I suppose you have the other things nearly ready?"

"Why, yes," Clay remembered, "I put the coffee

and potatoes over, and they'll be spoiled if I don't hurry back. You'll have to hunt up the boys after all. I'll get right back to the boat and get dried out."

"But look here," Case cried out, as Clay started toward the primitive canoe, "how are we to get on board if you take the boat back?"

"I'll tie a cord to the line and throw it back," Clay solved the puzzle, picking up a stone. "I suppose I can throw a rock sixty feet?"

"All right," laughed Case. "I didn't think of that. Now you get back and dry yourself. And get supper ready, and don't throw the line to the shore until you hear us calling."

Clay paddled back to the *Rambler*, and Case, led on by the dog, started off into the cedar thicket. At first Captain Joe trotted along calmly in the white circle thrown by the electric candle in the boy's hand, but as he penetrated deeper into the forest, following a wide canyon running between two precipitous ranges, he became excited and dashed on so rapidly that it was with difficulty that Case kept pace with him.

It was dark as a pocket in the forest, and the underbrush made progress difficult, but the boy and the dog kept resolutely on for nearly half an hour before coming to a halt. Then Captain Joe bristled his back, showed his teeth, and emitted a succession of threatening growls.

"What is it, old boy?" asked Case, hoping that the boys were not far off, as he was becoming weary as well as fearful for their safety.

Captain Joe advanced through a thicket for a few paces and then backed out, showing that, whatever it was that he was investigating, it was not very far away. Case did not urge him on, for he did not know what peril lurked in the darkness of the undergrowth. The dog continued to growl, but did not again advance into the tangle from which he had just emerged.

There was no wind whatever in that sheltered place, and there was only the roar of the rapids below the *Rambler* to break the silence, except that now and then a night bird flew protestingly from a perch in a nearby tree and winged to a more secluded position. Case stood with his light on the thicket for a moment, listening.

Then he heard a giggle from a great cedar in the middle of the tangle of bushes. It was not a laugh, but a positive giggle. The tree, only forty or fifty feet away, was thick of bough, and Case could not see into its top, but the giggle was repeated, and he walked forward.

There was no mistaking that giggle! Alex. was hiding in the tree! Clay supposed that the boy had seen the light coming and had climbed the cedar for the purpose of playing a joke on his chum, so

he walked on into the tangle at its foot and called out:

"Alex! Come out of that, you crazy loon! What are you doing up there, anyway? Come down or I'll send a couple of bullets up there."

The giggle came louder than ever, and Alex's voice came down from the lower boughs of the tree.

"You might keep your light going," the lad up the tree said, in a casual manner, "for if you let it switch off you'll probably receive a visit from the grizzly bear that has been keeping me up in this tree for a couple of hours. And keep Captain Joe away. His Grizzlyship could kill him with one poke."

"A grizzly bear down here!" cried Case, and the next minute he was some distance away, whirling the light swiftly around his head.

"The grizzly will like that, I know," Alex. said, calmly, from the tree. "He's a sociable kind of a bear, and has been inviting me to come down and accept of a furnished room inside of him. Suppose you take a shot at him, old man? I don't think he intends going away until he sees my finish. And, if I were you, I'd climb a tree before I shot. He tells me that it annoys him to be shot at."

"You everlasting, concentrated essence of cheek!" cried Case. "Why don't you shoot him yourself? He's your bear! What?"

"I clipped one of his ears," replied Alex., "and then my gun dropped to the ground and he ate it. At least I heard a crunching that sounded like eating a piece of steel. I haven't got my searchlight, because I had to throw it at him when I climbed the tree."

Case took the hint about getting up in a tree, while Captain Joe looked on in red-eyed wonder. He could not understand why the boys did not help him capture or kill the big beast sitting at the foot of the tree.

The grizzly had set up a protest at the interruption of his silent wait under the tree for the supper he had ordered, and was now sniffing toward the bushes where Captain Joe stood. He kept out of the circle thrown by the searchlight as much as possible, but was evidently determined to make a stand right there for his stomach's sake.

The light wavered and traveled about considerably while Case was worming his way up to the branches of a tree, and so, in the uncertain light, the bear kept going bravely nearer to the dog. Captain Joe did not retreat. So far as Case could see from his place of safety, the dog was getting ready to do battle.

"Here, Captain Joe!" Alex. called, "you'll get your dome of thought dented if you go fooling with that grizzly. He's been raised a pet, and doesn't like to have dogs seek his society."

“ ‘Dome of thought dented ’ is slang,” Case put in, from his tree, “and you’ll wash dishes to pay for it.”

“All right,” Alex. replied, submissively, “you just dent the grizzly a few and I’ll wash the dishes. I’m hungry, and I’ve a notion that Gran. has deserted, and I want to get back to the cabin. If I should appear on South Clark street in my present apparel, the police would pinch me for neglecting to patronize the clothing stores. See?”

“The bear got you, did he?” asked Case, anxiously. “Did he hurt you? Guess you got up the tree just ahead of him! What?”

“A thousandth part of an inch ahead of him,” Alex. answered. “He got part of my jacket and the most of my trousers. Hurry up and shoot.”

Case knew that the situation was serious, for, unless he could succeed in killing the grizzly, the beast might remain on guard all through the long night. Clay might hear the shots and come to the rescue and he might not. Alex.’s shots had not been heard at the river. Still, in spite of all, he could not resist the inclination to laugh at the boy’s description of his attire.

“I can’t shoot him unless I can see him,” he replied. “He’s in the thicket now, trying to look Captain Joe out of countenance. Whistle to the dog, and when he gets under your tree the bear will

follow. Then I'll turn on the flashlight and shoot."

"Great wisdom, considering your lack of early training!" cried Alex. "Here, Captain Joe!" he called, "Come away from that bear and look up into this beautiful tree! Come on, old snooks!"

The dog sprang away from the grizzly and backed, snarling, to the very trunk of the tree. Looking up, he saw his master among the branches, and straightway tried to climb up to him, an undertaking which was as loyal as it was impossible.

The grizzly sprang forward and lifted a huge paw to strike the dog, and that would have been the finish of Captain Joe if Case had not acted promptly. The circle of white light fluttered over the bushes for an instant, struck the bole of the tree just above the bear's head, and then dropped to his neck, where it rested.

The bullet struck the bear where the spotlight rested, at the base of the brain, and he dropped to the ground, dead to all intents and purposes, though his huge body contorted on the underbrush for a moment, and once or twice he endeavored to rise to his feet. The bullet had broken the spinal column and entered the brain. As the motions were all automatic, they soon ceased, and then Case and Alex., after other shots had been fired, came sliding down out of their trees, each grinning but white of face.

"That was a good shot, kid!" Alex. said. "You ought to have the hide for a rug!"

"I'll have it in the morning, all right," Case answered. "Just now we'd better get some steak and hustle back to the *Rambler*."

"But you said you'd have fish for supper!" suggested the boy.

"How long do you think a fish will remain fit to eat if kept in an oven after being cooked through?" demanded Case. "My fish was ready to take up when I came out after you, and that's more than half an hour ago. By the time we get back it will be burned to cinders."

Case threw the light over the boy and broke into a laugh, serious as the danger had been. The clothing was almost torn from Alex.'s back, and drops of blood were trickling down.

"He almost got you!" Case exclaimed.

Captain Joe approached his fallen enemy and then looked up at the lads with a gleam of admiration in his red eyes.

"The dog knows," was all Alex. said on the subject. "But, come," he went on, "let's get back. Gran.'s eloped, and we needn't wait for him."

"Eloped!" repeated Case, turning the light on his friend's face to see if this was not a new joke. "Eloped with whom?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied the boy, determined

not to tell anything about the meeting of the morning; "I saw him in here, just up there at the angle of the canyon, talking with a man, and then the bear came along—and I entered into conversation with the bear!"

"Did Gran. see you?" asked Case, wondering if the strange lad had observed Alex.'s peril and failed to protect him.

Alex. shook his head and plunged forward through the trees. Captain Joe barked at his heels a moment, and then ran back to the bear, where it lay on the ground under the tree.

"Wait!" Case called. "You needn't run away from me! Captain Joe is asking you to come back and take the grizzly with you. He wants some of that meat for his supper."

Alex. returned and the two boys skinned a shoulder and secured quite a quantity of bear meat, after which they resumed their tramp to the river. During this time Case had said nothing more to Alex. about the disappearance of Gran. He did not like the abrupt manner in which his questions had been answered, and resolved to let the boy tell what he knew in his own way and at his own convenience.

It took them a long time to get back to the river, and even then they found themselves some distance below the point where the *Rambler* lay, and where the fish had been cooking. The long, foaming rap-

ids lay in front of them, indistinct in the dim light of the stars.

It would be impossible for the *Rambler* to drop down to them, for the rapids would have drawn her in, even with her full power opposing, and, besides, there was the fish, which might be worth uncovering. So the tired boys trudged slowly along the rocky bank, sometimes turning into the interior to avoid coves, and saw, in the darkness, danger rockets ascending to the sky from the deck of the *Rambler*!

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERY AND A FISH SUPPER.

"CLAY is getting anxious!" Alex. observed, as a red rocket went hissing toward the stars. "He's taken the right course to hurry us, at any rate," he added. "It is a good thing we brought those rockets along with us. We may need them sometime worse than we do now."

"How do you know how badly he needs them?" demanded Case. "You have been away for hours, and it is more than an hour since I went into the forest to search for you. A great deal may have happened in that time."

"But Clay is safe enough," Alex. insisted. "If he wasn't, he wouldn't be capable of sending up rockets. If any one had attacked him, or he had met with a serious accident, he wouldn't be doing that, would he?"

"I hope you are right," Case replied.

"He's just sending a notice, in red fire, to us that supper is ready and waiting," Alex. laughed.

Captain Joe began to skurry on ahead, doubtless smelling the odor of supper from the cabin, but Case hastened to order him back. At the same time the boy shut off his searchlight and reloaded his automatic.

"It may be just as well to come up to the *Rambler* quietly," he advised. "After all, we don't know what is going on there. And I'm going to see about that fish, too, unless there are loud cries for help from the *Rambler*! I had a hard time catching that bird, and I'm not going to lose a fish supper if I can help it. It may be done just right at this minute. Who knows?"

"If we break our necks falling over these rocks, and drown in some of these pools, and brain ourselves on a fallen log, and kill ourselves in several other ways," Alex. grunted, "we won't want any fish for supper. This traveling in a desolate land in the night without a light is just about the fiercest proposition I ever came across."

Indeed it was slow work, and hard work, following the rugged, broken river line, but the lads pressed sturdily forward, notwithstanding the complaints of Alex., and they soon came to a point from which the lights of the *Rambler* cabin struck out on their uneven pathway. The deck of the motor boat was deserted, and there was no one in view in the cabin, so far as the lads could see, through the **two small** windows on the shore side.

Directly, however, they made out a figure moving about in the cabin, evidently stooping low in search of something. Then the great prow lamp was turned on and the deck, the bulk of the cabin, and the swift-running river for many yards about were illuminated.

"There!" whispered Alex. "Didn't I tell you he was safe and sound? You've got to go some to get Clay into a mess he can't get out of."

As the boy spoke Clay appeared on deck with another rocket in his hand. Case was about to call out to him not to waste it, but Alex. motioned for him to wait.

"Let's see about the fish first," he proposed, "and go on board with a meal that will make him lick his chops like a hungry cat. Cooked fish and bear steak will make him take notice, eh?"

"If you keep on talking slang," Case reproved, "you'll have to wash dishes all the rest of the trip. I'm not going to warn you again!"

"I'd wash a bushel of dishes if only I might empty them first!" exclaimed the boy, pressing one hand to the waistband of his torn trousers. "There never was a boy so empty as I am right now!"

By this time the rocket was showering a brilliant red light in the sky, and the boys were arrived at the place where the fish had been consigned to Case's rude oven. As the latter bent over to uncover the

contents of the pit Clay saw them from the deck and called out:

"The fish is here, piping hot on the stove. I was just telegraphing to you about it. Wait, now, I'll throw the line across, and you can draw the boat over. You don't deserve any supper, but I'll forgive you just this once. I've got a lot to tell you."

"Is that the cause of this Fourth-of-July celebration?" asked Alex. "If I sent up rockets every time I had something to tell, there would be something doing in the heavens every minute of the time."

"That is no fairy tale!" Case agreed. "Only you know so many things to tell that ain't true!"

A slender line came whizzing through the air, secured to a small rock, and Case caught it deftly and proceeded to draw in the heavy rope which would bring the impromptu canoe to the shore. Captain Joe was first in when the boat, if such it may be called, came to the water's edge, and Case signaled to Clay to pull him across.

"Why not let me in?" asked Alex.

"All right," grinned Case, "you may go if you want a ducking. The dog gave Clay a soaking this afternoon."

So the canoe started off with Captain Joe as the only passenger. As if to prove good character

and make amends for the mishap of the afternoon, he sat with dignity in the middle of the burned trough, and never stirred until Clay assisted him to the deck of the *Rambler*.

Case and Alex. were soon aboard. They halted at the door of the cabin, anticipating a flood of questions, but none came. Clay said not a word about the delay for an instant.

Then Alex. turned his back, and the boy saw the ravages the grizzly had made in the wardrobe of his friend. He said nothing, even then, but sat back on the railing and held his sides. Indeed, Alex. was pretty well stripped. Captain Joe looked up into Alex.'s face as if asking why he had introduced a new style of dress into the wilderness.

"The grizzly did that, eh?" Clay asked, presently. "It is a wonder he didn't climb the tree after you?"

"Tried to," replied the boy, looking Clay over as one looks over the face of a fortune teller who has described an actual event in the past, "tried to, but I dropped matches down on him. They burned his snoot, and he quit. But how is it that you know about that? Did you follow Alex. into the wilderness? Who told you about the tree and the bear?"

"When you got the fish out of the oven," asked Case, as soon as the other had asked his questions, "didn't you take a turn in the woods?"

"No," replied Clay, with a quizzical smile, "I

haven't been into the woods at all. Never went farther than the shore."

"Then you must be Sherlock Holmes, Jr.," insisted Alex. "The bear came on the stage more than a mile from here, and you couldn't have seen him from this spot. What is there about me that tells you that I was treed by a bear? Come, now, smarty, tell me!"

"Your clothes!" laughed Clay. "You have no idea that I would lay it to a fish coming up out of the river and biting you, have you?"

"Smarty!" repeated Alex. "If you know so much about what took place in the woods, tell me what has become of Gran. Come on, now."

"Gran. has gone over the rapids!" was Clay's astonishing reply.

Case and Alex. looked their amazement, but did not reply.

"He went past here in a boat, a boat that looked to me like the one we lost, and——"

"Yes, he did!" Alex. cut in. "I saw him out there in the woods. He was standing under a tree, and there was a——"

"He must have had to hustle to get to the river before we did," was all Case said. The mystery was too deep to talk about.

"You remember the waterproof paper and envelopes we brought with us," Clay went on, glad

that Alex. had stoppèd short in his explanation, "well it seems that he had some of both with him. How long he's been carrying them in anticipation of an emergency like this one, I don't know, but it seems that he had waterproof envelopes and paper with him when he left the *Rambler*."

"Well, what's the answer?" asked Alex. fidgeting about.

"Slang!" cried Case. "I know who'll wash dishes to-night!"

"Not very long ago," Clay went on, taking a sheet of paper from his pocket, "I saw a boat drifting down upon the *Rambler*. There were two figures in it. One was rowing, evidently just to keep steerway, and the other was laying on the bottom in the prow.

"When the boat came in the circle of the prow lamp, I saw that it was the one that got away from us where we found Teddy, and also that the figure in the prow was resting in a position which indicated an attempt at hiding away from whoever might see the boat from the *Rambler*."

"Robin Hood, and Treasure Island, and Robinson Crusoe are dull history compared to this voyage!" exclaimed Alex., drawing closer. "A man hiding in the prow of a stolen boat! Go on with the dream! You'll wake up directly and find the fish cold!"

"In a second," Clay resumed, with a tolerant smile, "I saw that the person in the prow was Gran., and that he was trying to signal to me. The boat came along pretty fast, and I didn't catch on to what he wanted until it was close at hand. Then he lifted one hand up over the edge of the boat and threw something up stream. The boat moved on down before what had been tossed into the water came to the prow of the *Rambler*. I reached down with our dipping net and got it. Here it is:

"'Alex. treed by a bear. Case approaching. You'll hear from me later. Keep your eyes open. Don't lose the f——'

"That's the end of it," Clay went on. "Now, who's ready to give the answer? Who rowed Gran. away? Why? What word had he started to write when he stopped?"

"You've got me going!" Alex. exclaimed. "I'm no mind reader!"

"What about it, Case?" asked Clay. "What's your answer?"

"I'm just out of answers," Case laughed, though there was a worried look on his face. "Look here!" he went on, "we've been trying to escape the mystery stunt ever since we returned from the Amazon. Now, suppose we quit guessing and wait for the answer? No one knows a thing about that boy, and that's the answer, so far as I know what it is!"

Clay and Alex. exchanged significant glances when Case was not looking in their direction. They both had a suspicion as to what the word beginning with "f" would have been had it been completed!

Their supposition that the word would have been "films" increased their wonder and added to the mystery. To tell the truth, they had both believed that, for some purpose of his own which he would be able to explain satisfactorily later on, Gran., had removed the films from the kodak, and now, if their suspicions were well founded, he was asking, under strange circumstances, that they be well taken care of!

Case went into the cabin and found the fish safe under a tin, secured by a heavy weight, on the table. Teddy was sniffing about, and Captain Joe was reproving him for his inquisitiveness by biting at his inch or so of tail.

"Now," Alex. said to Clay, "what about it? The message from Gran., the message sent adrift in the river and caught by you, seems to indicate that the boy never took the films—that he thinks we still have them in our possession—that he considers them very important! If he didn't take them, who did? Say," he went on, with a look into the cabin, where Case was getting out dishes and fighting the bear cub to keep him off the table, "isn't it about time we annexed the wisdom of Case? The only reason

we had for keeping all this from him was that there would be no talk about it which Gran. might overhear."

"Of course we'll tell Case," Clay replied, "but I thought that there never were any films, never any robbery at the pass, never any long-armed man talking with Gran. in the cedar canyon!"

"All right!" grinned Alex., "I'll tell Case, and then we'll cut it all out of the menu. We've got to do it in order to have any fun on the Columbia river. But where will Gran. end up if this thing keeps on?"

"That must go with all the rest," Clay replied. "But Case is beckoning us into the cabin and we'll see about that fish. Of course I'm eager to hear about the bear and the tree, but you can tell me about that after we see what Case's fish is like."

The fish was excellent, and even Captain Joe and Teddy were given all they wanted of it. Now and then, during the meal, the boys looked gravely over to the place usually occupied by Gran., but nothing was said of the boy's strange departure until the fish had disappeared. Then Clay told of the meeting in the cedar canyon, and of other strange actions on the part of the absent boy with which the reader is already acquainted.

Case was loyal to the absent one, and all three boys decided to go down the river slowly, in the

hope that Gran. would in some way escape from his mysterious companion and return to his friends.

“But how did he get back to the river so quick?” asked Alex. “He was away back there by the bear tree when I last saw him.”

“There is a bend in the river to the south,” Clay answered, “and the man who took him out evidently had the boat hidden there. By going to the shoreline at the bend he would save half the distance. I figured that out before you boys came back.

“And then,” Clay went on, “you came out at the rapids, and so lost considerable time. The question which puzzles me most is not how he got out, but why he went away.”

“And in our boat!” exclaimed Case. “The thief must have been just below us when the boat broke away. Well, we’ll get it back when we get hold of the scamp. It may be days before we see Gran. again, so there is no use in asking each other questions. We’ve got to get the *Rambler* around the rapids in the morning, and I’m going to bed.”

“I move,” Alex. added, rising, “that we anchor out in the river. We are too close to shore. I don’t want any ruffian sneaking in on us in the night.”

This was agreed to, and the anchor was lowered over a bar near the middle of the stream. This precaution taken, the boys crept into their bunks, but not for long. The mysteries of the night were not yet over.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SWIFT AND PERILOUS RIDE.

It was midnight by Clay's watch when the boy heard Captain Joe making a great argument out on the deck of the motor boat. He hastily drew on his trousers and a thick coat and stepped out of the cabin.

As he did so the boat rocked frightfully, nearly throwing him from his feet. Seizing hold of the railing, he switched on the prow lamp and sprang to the motors.

There was no doubt in his mind as to what had taken place. The anchor chain had either broken or been cut, and the *Rambler* was swinging down into the rapids. He called excitedly to the sleepers and set the craft in motion.

The motors responded nobly, but the full power of the machines was not sufficient to change the direction. Stern first, the *Rambler* was drifting with the swift current. He could see the waters on either side foaming over rocks, feel the grating of

the sides and bottom of the boat on obstructions beneath the boiling surface.

Case and Alex. came bounding out, their eyes half-closed from sleep, their automatics in their hands. For an instant, in a quieter stretch of river, Clay felt the boat spring up stream in answer to the powerful motors, but directly the motion shifted again.

"Put up your guns," the boy shouted to the others. "You, Case, come here and keep the motors in full action. You, Alex., get a pole and stand at the prow. Do the best you can to keep the boat off rocks. She is bound to go down, and we've got a fight on our hands. Steady, now."

"What is it all about?" asked Case, his voice only dimly heard above the rush of waters. "The chain must have been cut!"

Clay did not answer, but took the helm and managed to swing the boat into a smoother bit of water near the east shore. The current swept against the upper side, nearly tipping her over, as she swung, but in an instant the prow turned down stream and the boat righted a little.

"Keep her to the shore!" shouted Case, frantically. "We can never ride those rocks. Keep her toward the east bank, Clay, for heaven's sake, or it will be all over with us. What are you doing?"

"Full speed ahead!" roared Clay. "If we

should strike a rock while headed for either bank we'd go over in a flash! Our only hope is to keep her dead with the current and fight her through!"

That was a wild ride. Time and again the boat grazed great rocks, and more than once Alex's pole prevented a head-on collision with half-exposed boulders against which the mad waters swirled with terrible force, sending spray high up in the air. Wherever there was a setting of the current Clay led the boat.

Believing that the water would be deeper, the course freer of obstructions, where the current swung, the boy followed the drift for a mile or more without serious mishap. The prow light showed a rush of current the like of which the boys had never seen before.

Now the sweep wound off to the right, now to the left, now it dove straight at a boulder only to turn aside at the last moment because of the water already banked against it. The *Rambler* was light, and the swift motors gave her steerage way over the current, so in many cases she went over hidden rocks where a boat only drifting would have struck.

Presently a deeper roar than that about them reached the ears of the boys, and they almost held their breath as a high wall of rock loomed up directly in front. The current set hard against this bank and fell away in foam on a curving shore below.

"Now we are in for it!" shouted Case. "If we strike that rock we go to pieces. It seems all clear below."

Clay turned the prow away from the obstruction, but as he did so the current caught the broadside and whirled her round and round, seemingly a motor boat doomed to destruction after a hard fight for life.

But, when all seemed lost, a kindly fate sent the *Rambler* against a round rock and held her there, tipping frightfully, until the prow swayed away from the precipice against which the current was pounding with a noise like thunder. Clay saw the opportunity and headed the boat out a trifle and put the whole force of the motors against a rushing eddy which swirled just ahead.

The counter current caught the boat and swung her farther away from the rock, but not far enough away to prevent her coming within a yard of it. A minute later the *Rambler* dropped into clearer water, and Clay swung her away from the banks of foam which clung to the curving shore below. The rapids were behind!

Clay wiped the perspiration from his face and called to Case to shut the motors down to half power. This done, the boat traveled easily in the direction of an island of rock not far away.

"Shall we land there?" asked Case, speaking at

the top of his voice, for the tumbling water still sent up its clamor. "I think I see a ledge where we can get out if we want to."

"What for?" screamed Alex. "Let's get away from here."

Clay motioned to approach the ledge, and in three minutes the boat lay still, with her nose against a low shelf which ran a part of the way round the rocky island and then ascended to the very top.

"The anchor is gone," Clay said, regretfully, "so we'll have to hang on here with our hands. That is, unless we can find something to tie to. Look about, Alex., and see if there isn't a peak we can throw a rope about. I'd like to see what there is on the top of this boulder."

Alex. sprang to the ledge and walked a few paces. Then he called back, pointing as he did so. There was a steeple of rock just in front where a rope might be made secure. In a minute the boys were out of the *Rambler*, and she was tied safe and sound.

"That was a wonder!" were Alex.'s first words. "A wonder!"

"Seems good to get my feet on something solid once more!" Case said. "I thought, at one time, that we were out a motor boat, cheated of a ride down the Columbia river. I wonder if there are many places like that?"

"Lots of 'em!" Alex. answered, with a wink at

Clay. "Most of them have to be passed in balloons! Isn't that right, Clay?"

But Clay was climbing the winding ledge to the top of the rock which formed the little island and made no reply. While Alex. and Case were discussing the peril they had just passed and expressing opinions as to how the *Rambler* came to be adrift, the boy was mounting to the summit for the purpose of examining the river below, so far as it was possible to do so in the night time, with only the stars in the sky.

Directly he called to the boys, and they went bounding up the ledge, half anticipating something in the line of trouble. They found Clay standing in the middle of an almost round and level space about twenty paces across. On every side, save that where the ledge wound up, there was a sheer fall to the water. It was a very Gibraltar of a rock.

"Look at this, boys," Clay began, "there's been some one here within less than half an hour. And there's been a fire here, too, a fire built of dry sticks brought from the shore. Here are the embers, still alive."

Alex. nosed about the summit for a minute and came back to the others with a paper from which emanated a peculiar odor in his hand.

"They didn't cook here," the boy said. "There are no signs of the fire having been used for that

purpose, no scraps of food about, so I looked around to see what the fire was built for. I think I have found out. Look at this."

"This," was the paper he had found. Clay took it into his hand.

"Do you know what it is?" asked Case. "I think I do."

"Well, unless I'm very much mistaken," Clay answered, "this is a bit of paper which once wrapped what we call 'red fire,' used for lighting up parades, and also for signaling. The people who made this fire used it to signal from. There is no doubt about that."

"Then there are two parties about here, perhaps three!" exclaimed Alex. "I think we'd better get into the *Rambler* and scud for the Pacific ocean. This is getting too thick for me."

"I wonder if the men who built this fire, and who signaled from this rock, waited here for the *Rambler* to come down to them a wreck, with her crew drowned and pounded into unrecognizable masses by the rocks? It looks that way to me."

"They wasn't waiting here to give us any Christmas presents!" laughed Alex. "Come on, let's be on our way! I don't like the looks of things hereabouts, and Captain Joe is calling to us from the boat. Hurry up!"

Clay examined the dragging end of the anchor

chair when they returned to the *Rambler* and discovered that it had been broken by prying one link open. It must have taken a strong tool and a powerful hand to make the break in the massive chain.

"What's it all about?" demanded Case, as the motors were started once more, and the boat cut away through the water. "What are they after us for, I'd like to know? What are they after Gran. for?"

"Answer in our next issue!" grinned Alex., wrinkling his nose at Teddy, who was trying to crawl up the table leg.

"I'm going back to bed," Case announced, sleepily. "There's nothing likely to happen, and the conversation carried on by you fellows is irrelevant and immaterial. It will be three hours before daylight shows out on the plains, and four or five before this wrinkle in the world's surface gets any of it."

So he crawled off to his bunk and Captain Joe took possession of the sleeping place usually occupied by Alex., while Teddy climbed into Clay's bunk and curled up with his sensitive little nose on his paws.

"I'll sit up with you to-night," Alex. said to Clay, "for I want to talk with you. First, when are we going to get out of this?"

"I'm tired of mystery," Clay replied. "Right now we're headed for the ocean!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE RAMBLER TAKES TO WHEELS.

"STRAIGHT through?" asked Alex., who did not like the idea of overlooking the hunting and fishing along the river. "I'd like to get a shot at a bear and a deer before we strike tidewater."

"You have already had a shot at a bear!" laughed Clay.

"Oh, yes, but that didn't count. I was too high up in the air to take good aim, and I lost my gun, too. No, that doesn't count."

There was a long silence, during which Clay watched the moon coming up over the Rocky mountains, plating the rippling river and the brown crags with silvery light. The air was still, only the murmur of the water and an occasional protest from a bird breaking the silence.

"It's glorious!" Alex. declared, presently. "We've got to the point where we can appreciate a little quiet. If Gran. could come walking in on us now, things would be about right, don't you think?"

"Just about right—provided Case could catch another fish like the last one," was the reply. "I don't know what to think about Gran."

"I don't think about him at all," Alex. hastened to say. "I've got rid of it all! I'm waiting for the puzzle to solve itself."

"Where did the boy come from, and where is he going, and why did he come to us at the pass, and who is he, and why is he meeting strangers in the woods without our knowledge, and has he been carried off by force? And many other wheres and whys," Clay laughed.

"I give it up!" was Alex.'s reply. "As I said before, I'm waiting for the puzzle to solve itself. When it does, we'll know where my films went to, and that will help some. That's the key to the whole thing—the film robbery heads the list."

There was nothing more to talk about, for no amount of guesswork could unravel the mystery, and no combination of words seemed capable of throwing a single ray of light on the matter. The *Rambler* ran on through the night, carrying prow lights and side lights, and covered many miles before the morning sun lifted over the mountains and looked down on the river.

"What about loitering around for a time in the hope of finding Gran.?" asked Case, as he came from the cabin, rubbing his eyes, and noted that the

Rambler was under full speed. "We ought to look for him, anyway."

"We've given that up," Alex. answered. "We're going right on about our business, fishing and hunting, and having all the fun we can, regardless of all mystery. We might look for Gran. a thousand years, in this wilderness, and never find him. Also we might hunt for our lost rowboat until sheep grow wings, and never set eyes on it. Some one stole the boat, and some one abducted Gran. That's all there is to it."

"Yes," Clay said, coming to the assistance of the boy, "that is all there is to it. By to-morrow morning, if we keep on at this rate, we'll strike the place where the Columbia skirts a mountain and turns squarely to the south. At that place there is a human habitation or two, and we may hear something of the boy there. In the meantime, it is you to catch another fish."

"For breakfast, too," chimed in Alex., who seldom was out of healthy appetite. "I'm tired of pancakes and bacon, and fried mush, and boiled potatoes, and canned beans. Oh, oh," he shouted, jumping to his feet, "there's the bear meat!"

"I don't know whether the grizzly will make good eating?" Clay said, "but we can soon find out. If you'll get Captain Joe and Teddy out of the way, I'll fry a few slices."

"I bar that!" Alex. exclaimed. "I don't like fried bear meat. Say, what's the matter of parboiling the meat and making a bear stew? That will be all right. We've got potatoes, onions, turnips, rice, and lots of things to put into it."

"I wish we had a cabbage!" Case observed. "There never was a good stew that wasn't part cabbage. Don't they can cabbage?"

"Never heard of canned cabbage, but when we come to the salmon canneries down the river we can find out about it. You go and get the fish for breakfast, and we'll have the bear stew for dinner. Just take the canoe and paddle ashore and fish in some quiet pool."

Case clapped his hands to his sides in quick remembrance.

"The canoe?" he repeated. "Who's seen the old trough since the run we made through the rapids? Of course it was all banged to bits. Now, what are we going to do?"

"Make another," Clay responded. "We can make another in a day, or we can wait until we get to Boat Encampment and buy one."

"Then we'll buy one," Alex. put in. "It is too much of a job to burn one out. We can buy one for a few cents, of an Indian."

"And another thing," Case observed, "where is that bearskin rug you were going to have?"

"Back there in the woods," was the slow reply.

"Fish off the back end of the boat," suggested Clay. "There are fish in the middle of the river as well as in the quiet pools."

The loss of the primitive canoe was seriously felt, for there were not many places where the *Rambler* could get close to the shore. Also Alex. mourned the loss of his bearskin. Finally Case caught a five-pound fish, and the choice parts of it were soon frying on the stove.

After breakfast Alex. proceeded to make his bear stew, and Clay tinkered at the motors to make sure that they were in good order.

"If they had gone back on us when we were in the rapids," he explained, "we should have been drowned, every one of us. It was the headway of the boat that kept us going right. I'm strong for these motors."

It was a beautiful morning in one of the most picturesque districts in the world. There were white caps on many of the peaks, and the dark green of the cedar foliage and the brown of the rocks contrasted well with the sun-kissed waters of the river. There were bird-songs in plenty, and here and there a great fish leaped above the surface, as if to inspect this strange thing which rode upon the waves instead of, like a gentleman, diving under them!

After a time the valley of the river broadened

out on the west until a great stretch of forest lay between the shoreline and the distant elevations. Perhaps the word valley has been used wrongfully. The country in that part of British Columbia is really an upland plateau, with mountain ridges lifting still higher.

From its source near the Kootenay lakes the Columbia falls hundreds of feet in rapids and foaming cascades before it reaches the Pacific. It is a vagrant stream, winding this way and that, washing mountains and sweeping past high levels of tableland. There are salmon in the river and all kinds of wild game in the canyons and forests it skirts, so it is an ideal water course for such a trip as the boys had started out on.

About noon, when the sun shone hot above the dancing waters, the *Rambler* came to another drop in the valley. The boys could hear the water tumbling over rocks, and the growing current told them that the falls, or rapids, whichever they were, were not far away.

"I think we'd better get to shore here," Clay observed, "and take a look ahead. I don't want another experience like that of last night. It is only by the greatest of good luck that we are alive this morning."

"That's the truth," Case exclaimed. "And somebody is mourning over a plan that didn't work. I wonder if they think we are dead?"

"We've cut out all that!" Alex. broke in. "We can't have any fun if we keep our minds bent up into exclamation points all the time. Look!" he continued, changing the subject, "there's a place where we ought to be able to bring the *Rambler* right up to the shore."

The place at which the boy pointed did look inviting, and so Clay headed the boat in that direction. There was a break in the high bank of the stream, and it looked as if there might be a pool inside which would make a desirable harbor.

When they came to the broken bank they saw that a small rivulet entered the Columbia there, and that its waters, in some period of flood, undoubtedly, had carried a quantity of soil away, leaving a pond west of the river line—a pond which seemed to be deep enough for the *Rambler* to float in. Also this pond was almost shut in from the river, the scrubby trees growing there filling in between the two bodies of water except where the channel cut the natural levee.

"This is a beauty!" Alex. cried, as the *Rambler* felt her way through the opening. "We might hide away from a fleet of police boats here!"

Captain Joe seemed to agree perfectly with this expressed opinion of the locality, for no sooner was the *Rambler* within reach of the shore than he sprang out and began investigating the situation. Teddy climbed to the railing of the deck and would

have followed the dog only for the fact that he was tied to the prow by a long rope.

Alex. was off the deck almost as soon as the dog, and the two engaged in a wrestling match on the grass, a contest in which the boy came off an easy victor on account of the dog not being posted on tricks of knocking an opponent's feet out from under him. This over, the dog started off into the forest, looking back as if to inquire why Alex. was not coming along with him for a romp in the jungles.

"I believe I will take a turn in the forest while you look over the rapids," Alex. said, his eyes following the dog longingly. "We can have a run for half an hour, and then get back in time for the start. Anyway, why not remain here all night? That would be fine."

Before Clay or Case could offer objections, the boy and the dog were out of sight in the thicket. Their brush-tramping footsteps were heard for a time, and then there were no indications that they had ever entered the woods at all. Clay smiled as he looked at Case, following the course the two had taken with his eyes.

"After we have a look at the rapids," Clay promised, "we'll go hunting in there. Unless I am much mistaken, we'll find deer not far away from this valley. Venison would make a hit with me just now."

"That sounds good to me," Case answered. "We ought to get fresh meat before long, for our bacon is giving out. Now for the rapids!"

The rapids were more formidable than the boys had expected to find them. The bed of the river seemed to drop away several feet to the north, and the narrowing channel was spotted with boulders which fretted the current into foaming eddies. There seemed to be no main channel, such as Clay had followed through the peril above.

"I'm afraid we'll have to put on the wheels," Clay observed as he stood looking over the swirling surface of the broken river. "We can never sail the *Rambler* through there. Anyway, suppose we look for a place level enough to run the boat through. This bank looks good and level, and it seems to remain so for some distance, skirting the rapids like a highway. Do you know where the wheels are?"

"Certainly," replied Case. "They are under the floor in the prow."

The boys returned to the *Rambler* and lifted a hatch in the deck close to the forward stem. From the cavity underneath Case drew four wheels of about two feet in diameter. They were of iron, light as possible, with broad tires. Next came two long iron rods, with fittings at each end for the wheels. These were the axles. Then came great staples, shaped like a horseshoe, washers, and screws.

"How we ever going to get them on?" asked Case. "We neglected to hold dress rehearsals with these things!"

"I've studied that all out," Clay said, proudly. "We'll have to take to the water to screw these horseshoe staples onto the sides of the boat. There are four iron plates with screwholes where they go on. Oh, come on! I'll show you as we go along."

The boys worked steadily, understandingly, and fortune favored them, so, in a couple of hours the wheels were in place, and the prow of the *Rambler* was out of water.

"Now, when Alex. comes," Clay said, "we'll pull her out."

CHAPTER XVI.

TEDDY RECEIVES A CALLER.

THE sun dropped out of the sky above the valley, glinting the rough elevations to the east with golden light, but throwing long shadows where the *Rambler* lay, half in the water and half out. Still, Alex. and the dog remained away, and there were no indications of their approach.

"The next time Alex. leaves the boat," Case grumbled, "we'll tie a rope to him, so we can haul him back. He holds the blue ribbon for getting lost and meeting with foolish adventures."

Teddy, the cub bear, by this time a chosen chum of the white bulldog, sat up on the prow of the *Rambler*, listening for the return of his playmate, his small ears bent forward expectantly. Occasionally he turned his nose to the west, sniffing at the light breeze now blowing from that direction. Clay called Case's attention to the movements of the cub.

"I believe he scents Captain Joe!" the boy said. "He appears to be uneasy and expectant. The little chap has us beaten when it comes to discover-

ing an approach not yet in sight. Anyway, he scents something."

The boys were not in the boat, which lay at a great angle, the prow being on the land and the stern in the water, but were standing half concealed in the undergrowth which here fringed the natural levee. As the shadows grew longer, the boat more indistinct, a rustling was heard in the brush away to the west, up the rivulet, and then a heavy figure shambled into view. Case caught Clay by the arm and whispered:

"That's Alex., coming back with some of his monkeyshines! We'll just lie still and see what he'll make of the rakish attitude of the *Rambler*. Captain Joe is not with him, so he must have told the dog to lay low while he plays a trick on us. We'll show him."

The figure which had left the undergrowth was merely a dark bulk, moving cautiously toward the boat, on the same side of the pool as that on which the boys stood. It was without outline, and would not have been observed if it had remained stationary. It drew nearer to the *Rambler* noiselessly, like a person resolved to surprise an unsuspecting foe.

Teddy now began uttering low, coaxing whines, almost like those of a puppy at sight of its mother, and the boys hastily drew out their automatics and

their searchlights, without which they never left the boat. The moving figure sprang forward, and then the growl that came out of the darkness left no doubt in the minds of the boys as to what it was that was paying a visit to their boat. Case pulled Clay by the arm again.

"That is a grizzly!" he cried. "A grizzly weighing about a ton and a half, come to see if Teddy is perfectly contented in his new home.

"Don't shoot!" warned Clay. "We may not be as lucky as you were in the bush back yonder, and a wounded grizzly is a wicked thing to fight. Wait and see what she will do. Sure as you live, she's going to board the *Rambler*! What do you think Teddy will do?"

"The question with me," Case replied, "is not what Teddy will do, but what the bear will do. She can make a mess of that cabin in about a minute and a half! If I thought I wouldn't hit Teddy, I'd shoot and frighten her off. Wish we could reach the switch that throws on the prow light! That would give her a shock, all right."

"Oh, let them have their visit!" Clay replied, with a silent but pronounced chuckle. "We ought to feel grateful to the bear for going to the trouble of calling on us. I hope Captain Joe will keep away for a while yet. He would make trouble, I'm afraid. Hear the two talking together! I'd like to know what kind of a tale Teddy is telling."

Teddy was whining like a puppy and the newcomer was uttering low and threatening growls. It was evident that she knew that hostile creatures were not far away. The boys could see only the dim figures moving about, but it seemed that the bear was trying to coax Teddy away, and that Teddy was trying to obey but was held back by the rope.

"She'll bite through the rope!" Case whispered, "and Teddy will get away if we don't do something before long. Alex. wouldn't like to lose the little scamp. Suppose we throw a bit of electricity at her," he went on. "She might run at the sight of the light."

Presently they heard a crash in the cabin, as if the grizzly had taken full possession there and was rearranging the furniture to suit her personal tastes. It sounded as if she had climbed up on the table and broken it down with her great weight. Clay's whispered estimate was that she must weigh nearly a ton.

"I know what she's doing," Clay chuckled. "There is a box of sugar on a shelf near the door, and she is trying to get that. She's got her nerve, to invite herself to supper and then break the furniture!"

A shot and a loud call now came from the dark forest, and Captain Joe's deep voice came booming out of the shadows. The boy and the dog were re-

turning, and the situation was becoming more complicated.

"If Captain Joe comes up," Clay whispered, "he'll attack the bear, and she'll give him one swipe and then there won't be any Captain Jeo. We'll have to turn on our lights and shoot. Only be careful!"

The dog's voice came nearer and nearer. It was evident that Alex. was bringing in some kind of game, and that Captain Joe was making a kind of triumphal progress for him!

The grizzly was now making a great noise in the cabin, and Teddy was expressing his anger at the lack of attention. The boys crept toward the boat and waited for the bear to emerge from the cabin, so they could get a shot at her, but she seemed satisfied with the trouble she was making on the inside and remained there. Clay moved along toward the prow, his automatic ready for use.

"What now?" demanded Case, keeping at his side.

"I'm going to turn on the prow light," Clay replied. "We can't do any shooting by the light of the electrics. If she moves at all, as she will, of course, she'll be in the dark. Don't come with me, but get where you can shoot without hitting me. I'll be at the back of the boat, understand? Alex. and the dog are not far away now, and so we've got to do

whatever is done right quick. Don't miss when you shoot!"

"I won't miss if I can help it," replied the boy. "You don't think I want to be devoured by the bear, do you. Shoot straight yourself!"

Clay moved slowly back, entered the water, clinging to the side of the boat, now rocking violently because of the tumbling going on inside the cabin, and finally reached out for the electric switch.

When Alex. and Captain Joe emerged from the thicket, a second later, they saw a sight which stopped their breath as well as their legs for an instant. The deck of the *Rambler* lay at an angle of about thirty degrees, cocked up on wheels in front and resting in the water at the rear. On the prow sat Teddy, all wound up in his rope because of his twistings to get away, and from out the door of the cabin looked the stolid face of a huge grizzly bear, her little eyes flaming with rage, her teeth showing where the snarling lips were drawn back. Neither Clay nor Case was in sight.

Captain Joe bounded forward at first, but stopped at a call from the boy. Teddy sat up straighter and welcomed the dog with a whine, thus transferring his loyalty from the bear to the canine.

"Hey, there!" Alex. called out. "Where are you? I didn't know we kept furnished rooms to rent on the *Rambler*! Who's your new tenant?"

Then shots came from the prow of the boat and bruin rushed for the deck, but the incline was considerable and one of the shots had taken effect in her shoulder, so she fell and rolled, snarling, back to the door of the cabin. More shots came from the prow, and she arose and struck at the air with her great paws, as if trying to meet the bullets with all her brute force.

Presently she fell, wounded to the death, and then Alex. saw Case and Clay enter the lighted space and fire shot after shot at the bear.

"Save the lead!" the boy called. "Come back, Captain Joe!"

But Captain Joe had no intention of missing the final act in the tragedy in progress on the deck of the *Rambler*. He sprang to the side of the boat, looked up at the elevated prow, expressed his disapproval of the arrangement by a low growl, and, walking back, entered the rivulet and so climbed over the lower end of the vessel, where it lay down in the water. Teddy watched him with twinkling eyes as he approached the body of the bear. Satisfied that the grizzly was harmless, the dog slipped up to the cub and looked him over. The boys broke into laughter.

"Captain Joe knows that there's been trouble here," Clay said. "He is sizing up the damage. Wise old scout, that."

"Suppose we size up the damage in the cabin?" Case exclaimed, darting through the doorway and switching on the lights.

The cabin was in a mess, to express it mildly. Bruin had broken down the table while trying to reach the sugar, and the bear stew left over from dinner was standing in puddles on the floor. The coal heater was standing at an alarming angle—one of the legs having been knocked out from under it. The bunks looked as if the bear had tried to sleep in each one of them and found them all inconvenient on account of size.

"Never mind," Alex. cried, "I've got plenty of game out on the bank. We'll have a partridge supper, and give Teddy an extra share for bringing this big fellow here. Say, but he's a monster, isn't he?"

"That is a she bear," replied Case. "A she bear, like the one that came out of the wilderness and devoured forty children because they called a prophet names. I hated to shoot her, because she came here as a guest, but I thought I'd rather eat her than have her eat me."

"Teddy seemed to make friends with her until Captain Joe arrived," Clay declared, "but when the dog showed up the cub's allegiance turned to him. Which is the way of the world, after all!"

The boys set to work straightening up the cabin,

and, this accomplished, they dragged the great carcass of the grizzly to the shore and proceeded to skin it. Some of the meat was laid away for the next day, Alex.'s catch providing for the supper that night.

"We'll have to draw lots for the rug the hide will make," Clay said, as, hunter fashion, they worked salt into the green skin and hung it up.

"I ought to have it," Alex. insisted. "I shot the first bear."

"Case ought to have it," Clay advised, "because he shot this one."

"Oh, well," Alex. considered, "we'll all have this one in the club room we're going to fit up in Chicago this winter."

"Now, about supper," Case began, as they all assembled on the deck again. "How are we going to cook supper on this tipsy old boat?"

"We can build a big fire on shore," suggested Clay.

This was finally agreed to, and a roaring fire soon shot up in the tangle on the north bank of the creek. There supper was cooked and eaten, and then thoughts of sleep came to the tired boys.

"I think we've done wrong in building this fire," Clay said. "We might just as well have sent up rockets telling our enemies where we are."

"I don't believe there's any one within forty miles of us," Alex. put in, optimistically.

"What about the signals burned on the rock up stream?" asked Clay.

"Oh, that was a long way off. We'd better be thinking of how we're going to pull this boat around the rapids than worrying over people hidden in the bushes, watching Case eat more than is good for him. He's a wonderful hand at table," he added, as Case threw a potato at his head. But, then," he added, in a conciliatory tone, "I'm something of an eater myself."

"Who's going to watch to-night?" asked Case, presently. "Some one ought to. I don't think we ought to take chances, here on the shore. There may be more bears in the woods."

It was finally arranged that Case should watch until midnight, and that Alex. should relieve him then. Somehow, there was an uneasy feeling in the air.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTAIN JOE TO THE RESCUE.

CLAY went to his bunk early, but could not sleep. The events of the day had been exciting, and the danger was not yet past. Besides, his bed sloped with the body of the boat, and he had a sense of trying to sleep standing up. He could hear Alex. tumbling about in his bunk, censuring Captain Joe, who seemed to be going through some kind of a performance for the exclusive benefit of Teddy, the bear cub.

Case was moving about on deck, and Clay smiled as he imagined him clinging to the railing to keep his footing on the tilting planks. The prow lamp was out, and there were no lights in the cabin. There were stars early in the evening, but clouds came up after a time, and it was dark as a chamber in the Mammoth Cave before ten o'clock.

Presently it began to rain. The water fell in great sheets, and the wind, rising steadily, drove it

into every crevice in the light sheathing of the cabin. The drops drummed on the deck like hailstones.

Clay heard Case enter the cabin to prevent getting soaked, and heard him talking to Teddy, whom he seemed to have taken into his arms. Then the tired boy dropped off into sleep.

When he awoke Case was shaking him by the shoulder, and the boat was rocking and bobbing up and down, as if in the water the whole length, and not half in, as it had been when he went to sleep. He sat up on the side of his bunk and saw that every light on the boat was burning.

"Why don't you switch off the lights and let me sleep?" he asked.

"Hear it rain!" Case advised. "And feel the *Rambler* nodding to the rising water! Do you know where we can find that extra anchor?"

"It ought to be in there where the wheels were," Clay replied, getting out on the floor and stumbling over Teddy, who at once retaliated by biting and clawing at his bare legs. Case drew the cub away by the tail.

"You'll get put on the dunce block, Mr. Teddy," he said, "if you don't cultivate better manners. You're always under foot, like a pet pig on a ranch. No," he went on, addressing Clay, "I've looked in the prow hold, and everywhere else I could think of, and the extra anchor is not in view. I wish I had by

the neck the rascal who cut away the one we were using."

"Why do you want the anchor?" demanded Clay. "Do you think the boat will float straight up in the rain? We can find the mud hook in the morning."

"Use one of your own jokes to weigh the *Rambler* down," advised Alex., tucked up in his bunk. "They're heavy enough to weigh an ocean steamer down."

Case removed Alex. from his bunk, all bundled up in blankets, and rolled him about on the floor, not as a punishment for a too personal suggestion, he explained, but for the good of his digestion. Teddy assisted in the manipulation of the lad, and Captain Joe actually laughed.

"When you've finished with that monkeyshining," Clay said, "perhaps you'll tell me why you want the anchor."

"Just you go out and look," was all the answer Case made.

Clay did not go out and look, for it was raining steadily, and he would have been wet to the skin in a minute, but he went to the door and looked out. The little valley of the rivulet was a brimming ocean of angry water, and the natural levee which separated it from the Columbia was out of sight. In fact, there was a current running over it!

The *Rambler*, weighed down to some extent by the iron wheels which had been put on the afternoon before for the purpose of running her over the shore to the smooth water below the rapids, was still in what had been the sheltered pool, but the boat had floated, and the wheels were fast against the levee.

Whenever the water should lift the boat so that the wheels would clear the levee, then the *Rambler* would drift out into the raging stream, and the experience of the previous night would be re-enacted, with a different result in prospect. It was another trying situation.

"How in the dickens did this valley get so full of water, all at once?" he asked, turning back to the cabin. "This is serious!"

"There must have been a cloudburst on the mountain," Alex. suggested, arising and looking out at the yellow sweep of water, now far above the spot on the bank where the cooking fire had been built. "Looks like another flood."

"There is no soil here to catch and hold the down-pour," Case explained, "and this valley drains a lot of country, which seems to be mostly standing on end. The result is that a heavy rain here will send a lot of water into this depression, and there you are!"

"And it will send the *Rambler* over the rapids!"

Alex. exclaimed, "if we sit around here and wait for it to raise a few feet more."

"I don't know what we can do, I'm sure," Case said, dejectedly.

"Perhaps the river will rise so we can shoot the rapids," Alex. suggested. "That would be easier than rolling the boat around. I don't feel no nourishment in treating a boat like a wheelbarrow."

"Do you think we might do that?" asked Case, turning to Clay.

"We can tell by looking," was the reply. "This whole valley is a larger repetition of the little one the rivulet fills to the brim every time it rains. For a hundred miles, here, the valley of the Columbia is narrow, with mountains on either side. The rain comes off the slopes in sheets, and there is no reason why the Columbia should not rise six or eight feet during a storm like this."

"If it does, shall we risk it?" asked Case.

"I vote for risking it!" Alex. shouted. "What's the use of going for a boat ride and then trundling the old thing along on wheels?"

"Well," Clay said, to change the subject, "all we can do now is to get out a long, strong rope and tie up to one of the cedar trees. Who'll swim out with it? It will be like taking a morning bath!"

"I will!" Alex. replied. "I want a good swim, anyway. I'll put on an old suit, so I won't get

scratched if I go to the bottom over a nest of briars, and carry the rope to that big tree near where we built the cooking fire. The rope will hold the *Rambler*, all right, will it?"

"It certainly will," Clay responded. "There is nothing to fear from the rope, but you must be careful and not get into the current that is sweeping out into the river. No one could swim against that."

"I'll be careful, all right!" grinned the boy. "I don't want to do any long-diving stunts here. If I should go under out there I might not come up until I reached the ocean, which would be too long without food."

The boy put on an old suit which water and mud would not injure and, taking a light cord, fastened it about his neck and leaped into the swift-running water. He had little difficulty in swimming straight to the tree and, drawing the rope to him by means of the cord, secured the boat to the great cedar by the heavy cable. Then he turned back.

The lights from the boat lighted up the pool, or what had been the pool, and Case and Clay could see the boy sporting about in the water, now trying to mount a log which the current was carrying down, now dodging out of the way of a mass of boughs which obstructed his passage.

"There's something floating down that looks like a paper!" he finally cried, "and I'm going to get it. Just watch me, will you?"

He struck out into the swift drive of the rivulet and swam boldly for a few strokes, missing the paper at first, but finally overtaking it. When he turned back the boys could see that he was in distress. He was swimming with all his strength, but he was being carried out. The sweep of the tide was too strong for him.

"That's a fine thing!" Case shouted. "Turn in, kid! Turn in to the bank! Don't try to swim against the current. Turn in!"

Alex. did turn toward the bank, but the water swept him on, and he passed the *Rambler* with a white face showing under the lights.

"What can we do?" asked Clay, half crazy at the situation. "We can't do a thing! The ropes are all attached to the tree. Alex.," he called, "try to turn toward the shore! You can't swim against the whole river! Face the other way, down stream, and point for the shore!"

There was now a roaring in the boy's ears, and the water seemed a desirable place to rest! After he had lain inactive a moment he would have the strength to swim out! Many a tired swimmer has been deceived by the same ideas that came to Alex.—and never came out again except by the aid of human hands!

The despairing boy saw the cascade just ahead and knew that, once over the falls made by the

natural levee, he would be in the open river and beyond assistance. Still he swam, desperately, putting out his last ounce of strength. The lights from the boat did not shine brightly where he now was, and the turbulent river beyond looked dark and cold.

Then a white body struck against his back, there was a pull at his neck, and he knew that, slowly, surely, he was winning against the current. He realized that Captain Joe was holding him by the shoulder and, while half supporting him, swimming for dear life!

The boys on the *Rambler* watched the struggle helplessly. Captain Joe was doing more than either of them could have done. Now the swimmers gained a trifle, now they were swept nearer to where the flood tumbled over the levee. Captain Joe naturally drew toward the shore, and this at last brought them to safety.

After a long pull they came to a portion of the levee where heavy shrubs still resisted the rush of the water, and Alex. grasped them and, after breathing for a minute, worked his way to the shore, Captain Joe still clinging to him, for the dog was well-nigh exhausted. Clay and Case set up great shouts when the two started up the bank of the swollen pool,

They would still have to swim to gain the *Rambler*, but this was not at all risky, as there was little

current between the bank and the boat. Indeed, if Alex. had kept to this part of the expanse of water instead of swimming out into the current after the paper, he would have had no trouble in returning, and Captain Joe would have had no opportunity to show both his loyalty and his intelligence.

When the two clambered up on the deck of the *Rambler* they met with a reception which disclosed the affection that existed between the boys. They shook Alex. by the hands, and the shoulders, and called him "a great dunce" for swimming out into the current, and then shook hands all over with him again! And Captain Joe was petted and fondled to his heart's content. Even Teddy, the bear, threw his short arms about the neck of the big white bulldog and gave him a hug!

"Don't you ever think he doesn't know all about it!" Clay explained. "Teddy was just as anxious as any of us, and I thought I heard him scolding when you struck out into the middle of the flood. Captain Joe was positively disgusted then!"

"Was it hard to get him into the water?" asked Alex.

"Hard to get him into the water!" cried Case. "Why, he was in before we knew anything about his intentions. That is some dog!"

Rain was still falling, and the boys decided to build a great fire in the coal heater and sit by it until

morning. Should the river continue to rise, they thought, they would make the attempt to run the rapids.

"The high point won't come until this water has had time to get into the river and swell it opposite this point," Clay explained, "but we may as well sit up as to go to bed and lie awake thinking what a confounded numskull Alex. is. Still," he added, "we should have missed the little rascal. I'm strong for a medal for Captain Joe!"

It rained steadily all night, and when daylight came it was only a blur, for the clouds were heavy and low, and the rain seemed to fill all space. The river was up to the top of the levee, and the *Rambler* was pulling at the cable fastened to the cedar. The valley, so far as they could see, was a moving flood of yellowish water.

"If this keeps up until noon," Clay said, "I'll be inclined to take a jump at the rapids. What do you say, lads? Of course we'd have to take the wheels off."

"I'm for it!" cried Alex. and Case, in a breath. "Lead us to it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

CASE MAKES A HIT WITH DOUGH.

"THE river is running like a mill-race," Case declared, at noon, as he looked over the surging mass to the east of the spot where the *Rambler* lay, "and the rain is stopping, so I don't think it will get any higher. Shall we set the motors going and try to run down? I'm getting weary of staying here."

"You may wish yourself back a good many times before we pass the rapids," Alex. said. "If you think it's any fun to breast a strong current, just jump in there and try it. Then you'll see!"

"I'm not curious about high currents," grinned Case, taking a glass and looking down the river. The *Rambler* lay above the fringe of stunted bushes which had hidden the pool on their approach, and so the boy could look a long way down the stream.

"I can't see a single rock sticking up," he said, presently. "The current sets toward the other shore, and looks safe, but it is making an awful noise! It must be ten feet above yesterday's mark. Let us get ready."

"I'm for getting dinner first," Alex. interrupted. "I don't want to fill up on river water! We can fry some of the bear meat, and get up quite a meal in a short time. I like bear better in a stew, but we'll have to be content with fried meat this time."

"Both the bears we have met were in a stew!" joked Case.

"And they had us in the stew with them, too," Alex. replied.

So the boys cooked bear meat, made biscuits out of flour and baking powder, and ate dinner. Then they washed and put away the dishes and got ready for the exciting run ahead of them.

"We don't know what is below the rapids," Clay suggested, as the boat under full power, shot out of the pool and took the center of the stream, "but we're likely to find out right soon. Keep by the motors, Case, to see that nothing goes wrong with them, and you, Alex., stand by the prow with your pole, and we'll break the speed record for motor boats of our class. It doesn't make any difference how fast we go here if we don't strike obstructions. We'll be through all the quicker."

The boys were agreeably surprised at the ease with which the journey through the rapids was made. The *Rambler* rocked frightfully, at times, but the high speed at which she was going kept her in fairly good water, under the influence of the helm.

In a very few minutes she lay in a basin below the cataract. The water ran swiftly in the basin, of course, for the great mass above was forcing it on, but there were no obstructions and no dangerous eddies.

The whole valley to left and right appeared to be under water clear up to the foot of the hills. The boat was kept under motion until the light began to die out, and then tied up to a tree in a dell which had been dry only the day before.

"Now," Case said, switching on the lights in the cabin, "I'm going to celebrate the escape of Hair-brained Alex. by making a batch of bread. Real bread, I mean, of hops and white flour. If I eat any more pancakes I'll be as flat, mentally, as they are physically."

"I don't believe even the bear or the dog will eat bread you make," said Alex., "but you might make some. We may be able to use it for an anchor. Go ahead, Case, and I'll catch a fish for supper."

"Where's your oven?" asked Clay. "We can bake biscuit under a pan on top of the coal stove, but there are no pans on board the right size to fit over a couple of loaves of bread. They are too large or too small. We neglected to buy an oven."

"There's a granite iron pail here," Case laughed, "that will fit down tight over the bread on top of the heater. I'll mix up the dough, and we'll have it

all ready to bake before we go to bed. I've seen bread made lots of times, so I guess I can do the trick."

He took four packages of compressed yeast and put them in a cup to dissolve, first heating the water to blood temperature. Alex. watched him with a grin on his face.

"Why don't you put in some yeast?" he finally asked.

"That's just what I'm doing," Case replied, "and I'll get along just as well if you go and get that fish. We'll want him for supper."

Alex. snorted and went away, pulling the bear cub along with him. Captain Joe still stood watching the making of the bread.

When the yeast was dissolved, Case emptied a large quantity of flour into a great dishpan and stirred the yeasty water into it. Clay, who entered the cabin at that stage of the proceedings, hastened to ask:

"How much bread are you thinking of making, little cook?"

"Never you mind me!" retorted Case. "I'm making this bread. You don't have to eat any of it. Go on, now, and leave me alone. Ships' cooks are never questioned by the officers or the passengers."

Clay went out to help Alex. catch his fish, and Case mixed the dough up lightly, making almost a

panful. This done, he switched on the electric stove, placed a square pan, inverted, over the cherry-red coils, laid a board over that, and set the pan of dough on to "rise."

"That ought to be up so we can bake it to-night," he thought. "I'd have made bread before if I had known how easy it was."

"What do you do next?" asked Clay, standing in the door of the cabin.

"After it rises," Case answered, not a little proudly, "you mix it up good and hard and put it to bake. We ought to have bread enough out of that batch to last us a week. I can bake only two loaves at a time under the pail, but time doesn't count for anything with us, and the dough will keep."

The rain had stopped, and the boy went out on deck to see how Alex. was succeeding in his quest for a fish supper. Conditions seemed to be wrong, for the boy had not had a single bite.

After a time the lads decided to open beans and make a supper of them, with pieces of fried meat which had been left from dinner. Case brought the beans and meat out on deck, under the prow light, and they soon satisfied their hunger.

The boys sat out on deck for a long time, and then Case went in and switched off the electric stove. Teddy sat there watching the dough lifting in the pan, and the boy left him there, thinking that he

would soon crawl into one of the bunks and go to sleep. Then Case went out where the other boys sat looking over the rushing water.

"That dough is coming along fine," he exclaimed, proud of his achievement, "and will be ready to mix with more flour before long. I don't see why women make such a fuss over baking. It is just as easy as mixing pancakes. We'll have plenty of bread now. I'll make it often."

The clouds slipped away and the stars looked down. The strong electric light on the prow showed wreckage of all kinds drifting past. There were trunks and limbs of trees, some green, as if the water had undermined the roots of live cedars.

While they sat there, laying plans for the future, something which looked like a battered rowboat came sailing down. It surely was a rowboat, they discovered, as it came nearer, and Clay took up the glass and waited for it to come into the circle of light.

"Boys!" he cried, as the wreck flashed into view and then disappeared down the river, "I believe that was what is left of our boat. It looked like it, anyway! Now, how could that come here?"

"Caught in the flood," Alex. said, grimly. "I don't wonder that it is a wreck in that case. I'm a good deal of a wreck myself to-night."

"The last time we saw the boat," Case remem-

bered, "it passed us, and Gran. was riding in it, and a long-armed man was rowing like mad. It ought to be below us. I wonder if they were tipped into the river when the boat was crushed. Sure it was our boat?" he asked. "It doesn't seem possible."

"It was the wreck of our boat," Clay insisted. "Well, it is only one more mystery for us to forget. I wish Gran. was here to-night."

"So do I," cried Case. "He'd be tickled half to death to get some of my bread!"

"I hope the poor boy isn't lying at the bottom of the river, somewhere, or drifting in this yellow flood," Clay said. "I would give a great deal to know why he left us."

"He tried to tell us something in that paper," Alex. cut in. "I wish he had had more time to write. I guess that long-armed chap just grabbed him and started away. We'll catch up with him yet, if he isn't dead."

The boys talked for a long time, Captain Joe snoring at their feet and Teddy somewhere in the cabin. They would have been on their way that night, only they were entirely ignorant of the character of the river below them. There might be more dangerous rapids close at hand.

"Case," Clay said, at length, "why don't you go in and look at your bread? You turned off the heat, and it will be getting cold. Then we won't have any bread—which would be a shame."

"I clear forgot about it," Case answered. "I'll go right in and look after it. It won't get cold, for the pan under it and the board and the stove are warm, or were when I switched off the electricity. Guess I'll mix it now. It must be about time. Who'll stay up and help me bake it?"

"I will!" answered Alex. "I'm just hungry for bread."

Case went into the cabin and turned on the lights. The first thing he saw was a great heap of what seemed to be snow banked high against the table where the electric stove stood. But it was not banked up so securely that it was not pushing out over the floor.

Then he saw that the pan of dough had "risen," and that it was dripping down over the stove, over the table, and over the floor. It seemed to the amazed and disgusted boy that there was a barrel of it on the table and another barrel on the floor. It looked as if a spring of dough had bubbled up out of the pan and started to make a dough pond of the cabin.

Clay and Alex. heard him trying to gather the dough off the table, and stepped into the cabin. They took one look and fell down on the floor, screaming with laughter. Case turned angrily away.

"You seem to think it funny!" he said.

"Funniest thing I ever saw!" roared Alex. "What are you going to do with all that stuff?"

You've got enough there to feed a bread line. Oh, my! Oh, my!" and he rocked back and forth and shouted.

"I'm going to get this pile on the floor out into the river," Case answered, beginning to see the humor of the situation. "That in the pan is clean and all right, and will make splendid bread."

He took a broom and began pushing the mess on the floor toward the door, but it was too sticky. After the second muscular exertion in that direction he stopped and leaned heavily on the broom.

The white heap was lifting straight up in the air.

"Glory be!" shouted Alex. "If it isn't rising yet. Lookout, or it will push the roof off the cabin! Look at it! Look at it rise!"

The dough continued to move. It shunted this way and that, then actually sprang toward the boy, who leaped back in amazement.

"It is chasing him!" chuckled Alex. "The white ghost of the bread that never was is chasing Case! Oh, hold me, some one! He'd have made bread before if he had known how easy it was! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

The next moment it *was* chasing Case! Teddy, struggling under the sticky stuff, got to his feet and moved toward the door, trailing dough after himself in great stringy masses.

Case sat down on the edge of the table and roared. Clay hastened outside to have his laugh out, and

Alex. just rolled on the floor, connecting with the dough in more places than one and looking, when he arose, like a baker who had slept in his mixing trough.

"I told you to put a little yeast in!" cried Alex. "I guess you did it, all right. Now, you'll have a time giving Teddy a bath! Why not put him in the oven and bake him? We'll have lots of bread now! Wow! Wow!"

Case chased Alex. out of the cabin and set to work cleaning the bear. It was a thankless task, for Teddy resented his efforts, and seemed to be complaining that a cub couldn't even go to sleep under the electric stove without having his fine bearskin coat all mussed up!

After the boy had done his best Alex. turned in and assisted in the further work of preparing what dough was left for the oven. He chuckled to himself all the evening, and talked knowingly to Teddy when that abused little bear came to him for sympathy.

"When you see a printer making bread," he instructed the bear, as he washed flour and yeast out of his eyes, "you want to climb a tree. Case means well, but he knows about as much of the manufacture of bread as you do of the Federal constitution! Next time you see him melting up yeast, you take to the woods. It will be safer there!"

But, in spite of this sarcasm, Case stuck to his job

until the bread was baking under the granite iron pail on the heater. As luck would have it, his efforts proved successful, and the lads had hot bread and butter before they went to bed.

There was little need, they thought, of keeping watch that night, for the *Rambler* was tied up quite a distance from the river, in four feet of water, which was flowing over a piece of ground which had been dry not long before. They were out of sight from the center of the stream, and no one would be likely to wade or swim through the inundated country to get to them.

In the morning when they awoke the sun was shining above the valley of the Columbia and it was late. They paid little attention to the hour, however, for they were in no hurry now, and, besides, there was something more important for them to consider.

This was how to get the *Rambler* back into the river! During the night the water had run out and left them stranded!

"Tell you what we'll do," suggested Alex. "We'll have Case make some more dough, and that will raise the boat up so we can slide her in!"

"All right," Case declared, "have all the fun you can, but you won't get any more of that bread. Teddy and Joe ate it up after we went to sleep."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHY THERE WAS NO VENISON.

A GOLDEN morning followed the day of storm. A golden morning on the Columbia river! Still, the lads were in no mood to enjoy the beauties of Nature as shown in her wilder moods. The *Rambler*, as has been said, was stuck fast in the mud, some distance from the ever-receding water.

"The rocks are showing again," Alex. observed, looking down the river with the glasses, "and it looks as if there were falls ahead."

"The Columbia river," Case grumbled, "seems to me to be pretty sudden. She climbs up a couple of rods one day and drops down the next. I wish she'd kept up until we got through this valley."

"That's all the fun of it!" Alex. insisted. "If you want to live a life of idle pleasure, just you go and get into a scow on a country mill-pond. We came out here for adventures, didn't we?"

"From the looks of things," Case continued, "we ought to have brought a house-moving machine with us. How are we ever going to get this

boat back into the river. We might hunt and fish here until another flood comes along," he added with sarcasm in his tone.

"That would suit me, all right," Alex. returned. "I don't care how long we remain here. There's plenty of game in the woods, and, now that you have learned to make bread, we are not likely to starve to death."

Clay who had been roaming around in the sticky soil which the river had deposited on the inundated lands, now came rushing up to the boat.

"Get out the rifle!" he said, speaking softly to Case. "There's a fine deer back there in the thicket. We'll have venison for dinner."

All was excitement in a moment. Case brought out the magazine rifle, and all three started for the thicket where Clay had seen the deer. Captain Joe was left in the cabin, with instructions to devour any stranger who should try to scrape his acquaintance.

The boys walked cautiously for a short distance, then Clay stopped and pointed to a dense growth of bushes and brambles just ahead. Out of the tangle lifted the head of a deer.

"Why doesn't she run?" asked Alex., in a whisper.

"That's what I'd like to know," Clay replied. "She stood just like that when I went away to get the rifle. She must have heard me working my way

through the undergrowth. Maybe she's dead—killed standing!”

“Dead!” Alex. grinned. “Don't you see her move her head? There, she's pulled it down now, so there's nothing to be seen of her. Did you ever see handsomer eyes in a creature's head?” he added.

“Looked like she was asking us to come and help her,” Case declared.

“I noticed that,” Clay mentioned. “I wonder what is the matter with her. I'm going in there to see. Keep still, you fellows.”

Clay crawled through the thicket on his hands and knees, parting the bushes right and left, and making as little noise as possible. Directly he lifted a hand out of the undergrowth and motioned for Case and Alex. to follow him. The deer had again raised her head above the tangle and stood looking at the boys with pleading eyes.

“Never saw anything like that!” Alex. muttered as he made his way through the bushes. “I never knew a deer could look a fellow in the face that way. I thought they'd run away. Maybe she's hurt.”

When they came up to where Clay lay in the thicket they found the deer only a few feet away, standing over something lying on the ground.

“Why doesn't she run?” asked Case. “What

kind of a deer is that? She must be foolish in the head most of the time."

"Slang! You'll wash dishes!" declared Alex.

"No slang about it," reiterated Case. "That's just plain talk."

"Can't you see what the trouble is?" asked Clay. "There is a young fawn there, caught in the briars, and the mother won't leave it."

"I can see it now!" Alex. cried. "Pretty little thing!"

"That will make good eating, too," Clay observed, turning his face away as he spoke. "Come, now, who's going to shoot first? Better shoot to kill, for the deer may run away when she hears the report."

Case and Alex. looked at each other an instant and then sat down on the ground and watched Clay, who was still looking the other way.

"I don't believe I want any venison," Alex. exclaimed.

"I never did like venison!" was Case's comment on the situation.

Clay turned and looked his chums over in mock anger.

"Just when I find a deer for you!" he cried. "Just when you've got a chance you may never have again, you go and back out. What's the matter with you boys? Think the deer is not fit for food?"

"I've lost my appetite for venison, that's all," Case explained. "You can shoot if you want to. Shoo! Shoo! Shoo, deer!"

He arose and waved his hands at the animal, shouting at the top of his voice. The deer stepped away a few paces but came back at the bleat of the fawn. Clay regarded the boy with an amused smile.

"You tell me I can shoot, and then you go and scare her away," he complained. "What is getting into you boys?"

"Did you see her eyes?" asked Alex. "If you shoot her we'll leave you here in the wilderness. I'm going to see what's the matter with the little fawn. Is this the time of year for fawns?"

The other boys answered that they did not know, and Alex. said that he didn't think it was. But there was the fawn, with the mother watching over it, whether it was the baby deer season or not. The deer bounded away as Alex. approached, but stood watching as he lifted the fawn.

"Just got wound up in vines!" the boy cried. "Come and see what a clever little chap it is! Wish I could keep it."

"Nix! Not on our boat! Not with the mother looking at us like that!" declared Case, who had stepped up to the fawn.

The little creature was soon untangled, and set down in a clear space as near to the mother as the boys could get. The deer did not seem to fear the

boys, for she stood nosing over the baby for a long time. Then she led him away into the forest. Clay insists to this day that she bowed her thanks as the bushes closed behind her!

"There!" Clay shouted, in pretended anger. "You've gone and let many a supper get away from us. What do you mean by letting that deer run away in that manner? You're nice fellows to go hunting with!"

"Run after her and murder her if you want to," Alex. remarked. "The woods are open to you, and you have the rifle. Go on and do it!"

Clay laughed in a bashful manner. Someway boys never do like to let others know that they are possessed of sentiment!

"I wouldn't shoot that deer, not if I was starving!" he said. "I would always see her eyes looking out of the shade at me!"

"Don't you ever think I didn't know that!" Alex. answered. "I guess we are a lot of babies, after all. Now we'll have to eat bear meat for dinner. I can eat bear, for the bear would have eaten us if he had had half a chance. But the next thing is to get the *Rambler* into the river. That won't be no merry picnic, I can tell you. Wish we had left her in."

The boys made the boat as light as possible and then worked her along with handspikes cut from the woods. It was slow work, and many a time they stopped to breathe and joke over the job. Alex.

finally suggested that they put the wheels under and so make easier work of it.

"In this muck!" laughed Clay. "Why, those wheels would sink into this mess up to the hubs, and we should never be able to move them. No, we've just got to nudge her along in this way until we get to the slope that leads down to the river, and then she'll go easier."

It was noon before the prow dropped into the water. The boys were tired and disgusted, but they had been taught a lesson which they did not soon forget. They were lifted to banks by floods after that, but they did not permit the *Rambler* to lie there until the current ran out from under her! After dinner they started the motors again and speeded down stream.

The country was still wild on both sides of the Columbia, and the boys took plenty of time passing through it. There were many things to see and, besides, they still had half-hearted hopes that Gran. would come back to them before they left that valley.

But Gran. never showed up. The last thing they had seen that reminded them of him—aside from the half-conscious remembrance of the boy that was always in their minds—was the wreck of the row-boat which had drifted down the river during that day of the flood.

It was a week before they came to the great bend

of the Columbia. Here they found stores and traders' houses. They camped out on the bank of Canoe river and remained there two days, laying in provisions and getting acquainted with the people. During their stay there many came to look over the *Rambler*, and every one lifted brows in disbelief when told that the boat had found her way through the two long and dangerous rapids which lay above.

The boys made no attempt to remove the disbelief from their minds. It really did look like a pretty stiff yarn, so they let it go, loaded in their purchases, and turned the boat south on the great river, about two hundred miles above Upper Arrow lake.

At Boat Encampment the boys had asked, quietly, of course, if any man answering the description of the long-armed fellow who had appeared and disappeared so suddenly had been seen thereabouts, but no one seemed to have seen him, or to have seen a boy answering Gran.'s description. It was said that any one passing the place would be certain to be observed, so the boys sailed away with the notion that the two were still up the river.

There followed a number of restful days on a smooth river. There were rapids and falls, of course, but nothing to bring the lads into peril of their lives. They loitered along with the current, stopping at night and often not starting on again until the middle of the day.

The boys will never forget those golden days.

They fished and hunted, sat around roaring campfires at night, slept in the warm sunshine when inclined, and read stories of that wonderful land. There was only one trouble over which they brooded.

Gran. had disappeared. During the time he had shared the cabin with the boys, since he had come to them so mysteriously at the summit pass, he had endeared himself to them all. Beside the loneliness they felt at his sudden departure, there was always the undefinable feeling that he might be in serious trouble and expecting them to come to him.

"If we knew that he had left us voluntarily," Clay said, one day, "we might be able to drop him out of our minds, but we don't know that. In fact, it seems to me that he was forced away."

"But he wasn't tied in the boat," Alex. argued. "I guess he might have jumped out when he came to the *Rambler*. We would have shot that long-armed humbug to pieces if he had tried to stop him."

"There are ways of forcing a fellow along besides tying him up and carrying him off," Clay replied. "The man we saw him with may have some grip on him which we do not understand. We'll have to wait."

"That old train robber!" cried Alex. "What kind of a hold could he have on Gran.? I just believe the boy was afraid to stir when he passed the *Rambler* that day. Wish I'd shot that big stiff!"

"Besides," Clay went on. "Gran. passed us that

note. It was hastily ended, as if he had been interrupted in writing it. And when he threw it out into the river he made sure that the man who was rowing did not see the movement."

"The sneaking hold-up man!" Case broke in, angrily.

"We don't know anything about him," Clay concluded. "We have no proof that he assisted in robbing the train. In fact, we know that he did not, for he was on the train that carried us into Donald."

"But he might have put up the job," insisted Alex.

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN JOE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

AND in this way all their discussions concerning Gran. and the mysterious man ended. There were no signs to go by. They hadn't a thing to point to as an established fact in connection with the boy except that he had come to them in trouble, had been assisted, and had been grateful.

And there were no clues to connect the long-armed man with any crime whatever. The boys knew that he had not been present at the robbery of the train, and that is all they did know about him, except that he had followed on after them and either coaxed or forced Gran. to desert them.

The larceny of the films was still a mystery. No one save a member of the party could have taken them, they thought. No one except a member of the party would have been likely to have opened the kodak and taken the films out right there in the cabin. An outsider, it was certain, would have taken the kodak with him and opened it at some less perilous time.

So far as the robbery was concerned, the boys had believed that Gran. had taken them. They had

held that opinion until the note had been fished out of the river. The note had started in to say something about the films. If he had stolen them he would not be apt to talk or write about them to the boys.

But the great point in connection with the films was this:

“Why had they been taken?” This question was more important to their minds than the one which all had asked at first: “How had they been taken?”

There was an indistinct notion in Alex.’s mind that he had seen dark faces behind those sitting in front of the fire at the pass. He believed that he had secured some fine pictures of the campers, as he called them, and was of the opinion that if other faces had peered out from the shelter of the rocks just at the right moment they, too, would have entered the photograph in distinguishable positions.

Who were the men loitering back there in the shadows? Were they the men who had held up the train? And was this the reason why they could not afford to have even one of their faces show in a photograph taken **at that spot, at that time?**

They all believed that Gran. could clear up a good share of the mystery if he saw fit to do so. They had believed all along that he would tell all he knew about that night just as soon as he became more intimate with them. But he had left, voluntarily or by coercion, without referring to the matter **except at**

the end, when he had written the word "films" in the note he had cast out on the river.

The boys talked little of the mystery which surrounded the appearance and disappearance of Granville, but they thought about it a lot.

It is not far from thirty miles, as the river runs, from Boat Encampment to Gold creek, which flows into the Columbia river about west of Glacier lake, far up on the eastern ridge of the Rocky mountains. Here the lads found themselves, one night, sitting around a great fire on the northern bank of the creek.

Gold creek has its source in the western heights of the mountains running along on the west side of the Columbia river during its course to the north. At that point the two branches of the river are only about thirty miles apart, but there is a high range of mountains between the two currents. Gold creek penetrates so far into the hills where it has its source that a few miles farther to the east would send its waters into the eastern branch of the Columbia.

The boys were enjoying themselves that night. Captain Joe and Teddy were out on the bank, sporting about, chasing each other into the low bushes which fringed the creek. The bear had become so tame that it was not necessary to keep him tied.

In fact, Alex. declared that he would follow them to the end of the earth if they tried to get rid of him.

Captain Joe made much of the cub, and the boys called it a happy family.

As they sat there by the camp-fire a long, faltering call came from darkness to the east. The mountains come close to the valley there, and Gold creek runs fast. The voice they heard seemed to come from the creek itself.

Captain Joe gave over playing with the bear and darted away. The boys called to him to come back, but he paid no attention to them. His conduct was so unusual that all started up to ascertain the cause of his disobedience. But before they were fairly on their feet he was hidden in the darkness. The astonished boys looked at each other in silence.

Then Clay hastened back to the fire and threw on more lightwood, sending the flames high up above the bushes. He also hastened to switch on the electrics on board the *Rambler*.

"There is some one in distress up there," he concluded, "and we'll give them all the light possible. Strange thing about Captain Joe."

"He never did a thing like that before," Case commented.

"I'm afraid he'll get into a mix-up with a bear," Alex. observed.

"But that wasn't a bear that called!" laughed Clay. "That was a human voice, and it sounded as if the one who called was about all in."

"That's the way it sounded to me," Case agreed.

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"It may be the man who stole the boat and took Gran. off in it," Alex. suggested. "He may have started across the mountains and become lost."

"He wouldn't be calling to us," Case said, with a superior smile. "He will be apt to stay away from us! At least, I should think he would."

"Huh!" commented Alex. "He wouldn't know whose fire it was, would he? He might think it some hunter's camp. Besides, I have a notion that he thinks we were drowned when he cut the chain of the anchor. No, he hasn't any idea that we are here. I hope it is him. Then we'll get some news of Gran. Listen! There it comes again, and it is not very far away, either. That weak voice never traveled far."

The call was repeated again and again, and all the boys left the fire and started off up the creek, not forgetting to take their electrics and automatics with them. There were stars in the sky, but it was dark under the trees along the bed of the creek.

When they were a few paces from the fire the voice called again, faintly.

"Pretty close by!" Clay observed. "I wonder where Captain Joe is? He ought to be showing up somewhere. Hope the fellow, whoever he is, won't mistake him for a grizzly and shoot him. There's his voice now."

Captain Joe was indeed close by, sending a long, heavy call into the darkness. He seemed to be no

farther away than the one who had called for assistance. The boys moved forward swiftly.

"He's found the stranger!" Case exclaimed. "I know by the sound of his voice that he has treed something. Good old Captain Joe!"

Directly the dog came out of a thicket, leaped joyfully about the feet of the boys, gave utterance to low growls of satisfaction, and ran back into the undergrowth, as if inviting the lads to follow on and see what he had discovered. They were not slow in accepting the invitation.

Clay was in the lead, his searchlight on the ground. Presently he came to a little shelter made of fresh boughs and stopped to investigate.

"That's been built within a short time," he declared, as Case and Alex. came up. "But where did Captain Joe go so quickly?"

"He's probably inside that hut," Case replied. "He ran that way."

The next moment the dog peered out from under the stacked up boughs, seeming to say to his friends that he had found some one there.

"I guess he has, all right," Clay said, when Alex. expressed this idea. "He has found a human being, for there are empty tins about, as if some one had eaten here. Come out, Captain Joe!"

But Captain Joe did not obey. Instead, he retreated under the boughs and growled a further invitation for them to come into his parlor!

Clay pushed his light farther and opened the overhanging mass of foliage. What he saw inside was a slender figure lying on a rough bed of leaves and grass. At the side of the figure were several tins of food which had not been opened. Captain Joe was bending over the face, which lay in the shadow, caressing it with his soft tongue.

Clay pushed the dog away and lowered his light. Then the cry he uttered caused Case and Alex. to rush through the sheltering boughs and stand by his side. In a moment all were on their knees at the side of the figure, now lying with closed eyes.

"It is Gran.!" Clay shouted. "It is Gran. come back to us!"

"He's dead, I guess!" was Alex.'s sad comment.

Clay bent forward and took the boy's hand into his own.

"No," he said, "he is still alive. Now, how the Old Harry did he ever get here? And what is the matter with him?"

Case pointed silently to one leg, lying off the rough bed. There were rude splints tied to it with strips of cloth torn from the boy's trousers. The garment had been cut from the leg, and it could be seen what the splints meant.

"He's fallen and broken his leg!" Case exclaimed. "Poor chap!"

"And he built this shelter to die in!" faltered

Alex. "I wonder if he will ever come back to consciousness?"

The shelter had evidently been constructed by the injured boy with the intention of resting for a time after his bungling attempt at leg-setting. The food he had brought there had been set out in orderly array within reach of his arm as he lay on his couch of foliage, and a dish of water—a two quart basin which forest travelers sometimes use to cook in—sat not far away. An attempt had been made to build a fire near the hut, but this had not proved a success. Burned matches lay around, but none of the dry sticks had caught fire.

"He was making a fight for life, all right, poor little chap!" Clay said, wiping a suspicious moisture from his eyes.

"I reckon he called to us with his last strength," Case muttered.

"I'm afraid so!" Clay answered. "Well, how are we going to get him to the boat without causing him great suffering? He ought to be moved right away, before he comes back to his senses."

"I'll run back to the *Rambler* and bring a long board there is under one of the bunks," Case suggested. "Then we'll carry him on that, just as if it was a stretcher. We'll give him his old bed in the cabin, and when he comes to he'll be so glad to get back that he won't know he's got a broken leg!"

The boy was away like a shot, and presently returned with the board.

Gran. was lifted gently on the improvised stretcher and carried, as gently as the uneven nature of the ground would permit, to the boat. He did not open his eyes during the removal, and the boys became frightened, fearing that he was indeed dead. Alex. hustled around and had water on the stove heating in short order.

"He's got to have hot water on that leg," he said. "I guess I can take that swelling down a little. Now, do you think you can tell, either of you, how bad the injury is, and whether the bone is splintered or just broken short off?"

Clay cautiously applied a hand to the injured limb, feeling on both sides of the splints. In a second he looked up with a smile on his white face and added more fuel to the fire so as to hasten the heating of the water. Case and Alex. looked at him questioningly.

"The little hero set his leg himself," Clay said. "I don't know how he ever did it! The bones are back in place, and the flesh is not at all bruised. The brave little chap! How did he ever do it?"

"He probably killed himself doing it," wailed Alex. "He fell down some precipice and crawled miles to a spot where he could get wood for the splints. Crawled miles with that broken leg and car-

ried his food with him! He's a little hero, that's just what he is!"

There was no sleep for the boys that night. Gran., worn out by suffering and over-exertion, lay until daylight with his eyes closed.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CAMP-FIRE HIGH ON THE HILLS.

THERE was quite a celebration in the cabin when, at last, just as the sun came into view over the mountains, Gran. opened his heavy eyes and looked about. All three boys were at his side instantly, and Captain Joe, who seemed to claim precedence by right of discovery, put his great paws up on the bunk and addressed soft phrases in dog talk to the patient.

"For my sake don't tell him that he mustn't talk, now!" Alex. broke out. "Of all the chestnuts of fiction that is the worst! Let him get his troubles off his chest! Hello, Gran., old top! How are you?" he added, wrinkling his freckled nose at the boy on the bunk. "Brace up!"

"And don't you dare to look wildly around and say, 'Where am I?'" Case threatened, taking up the mood of the first speaker. "That is another of the terms kept standing in all printing offices. You're looking fine this morning, old man!" he continued,

determined to cheer the boy up to the point of a smile if that were possible."

"What kind of a foolish house do you think we keep here, Gran.?" asked Clay. "These lads are doing a lot of talking, but neither one has made a move to get you something to eat. What will you have? Fish, partridge, bear or baked beans? Apple pie, dried apple pie, red apple pie, or pie-pie! Give a name to it, and you'll be feeding like a king in no time at all!"

Gran. laughed at the waiter-like tone and manner, and tried to sit up, but was glad to lie down again.

"I know where I am," he said, but I don't know how I came here. I guess the *Rambler* is going somewhere, but I don't know where."

"You don't know where you're going, but you're on your way!" chanted Alex. "Well," he continued, "you're going down the Columbia river, according to schedule, and that is enough to know. That's all any of us know. We came around by Canoe river, and you came across the mountains, and we beat you to it."

"Yes, I came across the mountains," Gran. said, weakly, "and got a tumble, and had a fright of a time getting down to the river valley. I saw your lights and that's about all."

Not a word about why he had left the *Rambler*, or where he had put in his time since then, or how the rowboat had been obtained and, later, wrecked! Not

a word about the man in whose company he had last been seen! Not a word about the missing films! Not a word calculated to clear up any part of the mystery!

"You did a good job setting that leg," Clay said, to break the awkward silence. "You must have had a bad time doing it, too."

"I did," Gran. confessed. "I had a wretched time. I tied my foot to a tree, after I had the splints bound lightly on, and dropped down a bank. I heard the bones snap back into place, and knew that the splints were holding them there, and went to sleep!

"It was a long time before I sensed any pain again. Then I got back to a level spot and tightened the splints. Are they still on?"

"Still on, and right as a book!" exclaimed Alex. "You're a brick!"

"That was after you got to the valley?" asked Clay. "How far had you walked with that broken leg before you found splints and mended it?"

"Oh, I don't know!" was the reply. "It seemed that I was out days and days, and a bear came and sat by me, and Captain Joe drove him off, and then I woke up in the cabin of the good old *Rambler*!"

The boys exchanged significant glances. Was it true that the dog had driven off a grizzly, or was the boy telling what he saw after his brain had become affected by suffering? They asked no questions, for the boy's eyes were closing, and they knew

that he needed rest more than they needed information. In a minute the lad was resting easily.

"What do you make of it?" asked Alex., as the three boys stood out on the bank, Captain Joe capering clumsily about them.

"What do I make of what?" demanded Case. "Talk United States."

"I guess you are sparring for time!" laughed Alex. "So you don't know what to make of it? You haven't a thought in your head?"

"That is the truth of it," Case returned. "I don't know why Gran. doesn't say something about his desertion of us. I have given up trying to think that out, so we'll build up more fire, get a bed of coals, and broil bear steak for breakfast. I'm getting hungry, and I guess Gran. will need a little sustenance when he wakes up. Say, wasn't it a blessing that we came along just as we did? Otherwise, he would have died. Never could have made his way out with that broken leg!"

While Clay and Case broiled bear steak and made coffee Alex. whistled to Captain Joe and started away. Taking the course pursued the previous evening, he soon came to the rough shelter which the injured boy had prepared. There he sat down and held a threatening finger up to the nose of the white bulldog.

"Tell me, Captain Joe," he said, gravely, "did

you find a bear here last night, and did you drive him away? Tell me, quick, old fellow."

The dog turned away with a sniff and circled around the hut. Alex. followed, soon coming upon claw tracks in the earth. He turned to Joe.

"I believe you did!" he cried. "Now, if you please, will you go show me where that bear is? I want a short conversation with him. What?"

Captain Joe started off in the direction of the high ridges to the east, and finally paused at the opening to a deep cavern in a towering cliff. Alex. looked in and sniffed inquiringly, after which he backed out and turned toward the campfire, Joe marching along at his side.

"You're a wonder, dog!" the boy exclaimed. "You're a wonder, and no mistake about it! I'll have you put in a book when we get back to Chi."

Captain did not seem to take kindly to this proposition, for he hastened back to the fire and lay down with his nose cuddled between two rather dirty paws. Alex. came in in a moment and told what he had seen.

"I guess the dog did see a grizzly," Clay decided, "and drove him off. It is a wonder he didn't get his ears boxed!"

"Our lights probably had something to do with the retreat of the big brute," Case suggested. "I wish we had found him there!"

Gran. ate bear steak and drank coffee when he

awoke, and the boys loafed about the *Rambler* and made merry. During the day the injured boy talked of almost everything except the things in which his chums were interested.

He told of some of his experiences in crossing the mountains to the headwaters of Gold creek, but did not say how he came to be in that wild region all alone, nor why he had written the note saved from the river. Naturally the boys were consumed with curiosity, but they asked no questions, leaving the solution of the problems to time and to future moods of their patient. Gran.'s leg mended fast, and he was soon as full of fun as the others. Still no hint of the reason for his disappearance!

All the boys enjoyed the leisurely progress down the river which followed. They were often obliged to work their way around falls and long, foaming rapids, but they did the work cheerfully, and took all the more comfort in smooth stretches of water when they came to them. Below Gold creek the valley widens to the west, and a high plateau presents a vast area of growing timber. Only a short range of mountains divides this fertile stretch of country from the high plains drained by the Fraser river.

The boys tied up one night at Seymour creek which flows into the Columbia from the west, about thirty miles below Gold creek, and made a camp on shore.

"This," Clay, said in the morning, "is one of the

finest timber sections in the world, and I'm not going to run through it. Some day there will be great farms here, with wheat growing luxuriantly during the short season. Now there is plenty of game, and I'm going to get some of it."

"I think I'll take a trip to Sir Donald mountain," Alex. said, pointing across the big river, where the white cap of the peak shone in the sunlight. "I want to see how the country looks from the roof."

"You should have been with me on my excursion over the mountains!" Gran. remarked. "You'll find it cold up there, and you'll find slippery rocks and precipices which reach down into the bowels of the earth!"

"I want to see things!" Alex exclaimed. "If I had been looking for a peaceful life, I would have rented a boat in Chicago and sat out in the South Branch with it! Me for the high spots!"

"I think I'll go along with him," Case observed. "I want to see the high spots, too, and, besides, I may be able to keep this rash youth from getting treed by a grizzly again! He's always getting into trouble!"

Clay finally agreed to remain with Gran. during the day, and the two adventurous boys were landed on the east side of the Columbia, not far from the mouth of Six Mile creek, close to the foothills which rise to the greater elevation of Sir Donald mountain. It was early on a splendid morning in

early spring, and the boys felt the influence of the time moving the blood swiftly in their veins. Youth was in their every movement and the spirit of adventure sung in their ears!

It was a long walk to the place where the mountain asserted itself above the hills, and, a little over half way there, the lads stopped and sat down on a rock to eat the sandwiches of bread and bear meat which they had brought with them. Around them was a rugged country, several hundred feet above sea level.

Although the bulk of the mountain was still some distance to the east, there were canyons and lifting crags all about them. Just below, the thin thread of Six Mile creek glistened in the light of the morning. The springs which give rise to this stream are far up in the mountains, and melting snow has much to do with the quantity of its waters.

"Straight east of where we are," Case said, as they ate their dinners," are the rapids we had such a time passing.

"No," Alex. answered, looking at a map, "the rapids are some miles to the north. Straight east of this point is Beaver, where the Canadian Pacific turns south toward Rogers pass and Glacier House."

"Guess you are right," Case admitted, looking over Alex.'s shoulder. "And just a little way to the south is Donald, where we took to the river. Just think of what a country this is! We have

traveled something like two or three hundred miles, as the river runs, and yet we are not more than fifty miles from where we launched the *Rambler*! What a country this would be for outlaws to hide in! Train robbers, for instance!"

"For all we know," Alex. replied, "the men who held up the Canadian Pacific train, the men who have been following us, so far as we can judge, may be hiding in here! To tell you the truth, old chap, that is one reason why I wanted to come here. Last night, while looking over this way, I saw the smoke of a campfire right about here. It was a big fire, for it lighted up quite a space, and I could see people moving about."

"Shadows!" Case answered, scornfully. "You never could see people in the night at this distance from our camp."

"Remember," Alex. insisted, "that they were high above us, and that the fire shone on a face of rock back of them. Remember, also, that the smoke went straight up and gave me a good view of a blazing fire."

"Oh, well," Case decided, critically, "you might have seen figures moving about. You had your glass, of course?"

"Certainly. Well, there were people camping over here, and I thought I'd like to see what kind of people they were. I said nothing to Clay about my motive in coming here, because he thinks I'll

be getting into trouble enough with peaks and canyons, without hunting up mysterious camping parties in the Rocky mountain district."

"I'm glad you didn't mention it to him," Case mused. "He would have been anxious about us. Just as if we aren't big enough to take care of ourselves. Have you seen the place where the fire was yet?"

"Yes," replied the boy, "it is across this little valley, up against the face of that rock. See, the rock is smudged!"

"Yes," Case exclaimed, swiftly moving under cover, "and there are smudgy looking men coming after us with guns in their hands! Duck, partner!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SURGEON TURNS DETECTIVE.

CASE dodged deeper into a rocky depression as he spoke, and Alex. was not slow in following him. Three men, all carrying guns, were approaching from the south, now in full view as they mounted an elevation, now lost to sight as they dipped into a canyon. The boys watched them furtively.

"I wonder if they saw us?" queried Alex., shifting about so as to look over a stunted shrub growing on the edge of their hiding-place

"I think not," Case reasoned, "for they are headed farther to the east. Looks like they were going up the slope in search of game."

"I just believe they are the train robbers!" Alex. exclaimed, in a moment. "You know, we were talking, a short time ago, about what a cute little place this would be for a fugitive to hide in."

"And they may be hunters, or officers in quest of the robbers," Case amended. "Anyway, there's their camp, to the left of that crag, and we'll work over that way as they get farther off. If they did see us, and are hoping to capture us, the safest thing for us to do is to double back, like rabbits. Come along!"

Keeping under cover of ridges, sneaking through depressions in the broken surface, the boys moved toward the spot indicated by Case. In a few moments they saw that the three men were bearing farther away to the north and east. This fact relieved their minds of the suspense which the sight of the advancing men had occasioned, and they made more open progress.

Directly they came to the camp itself, and were delighted to see that it was shut out of view from the direction taken by the men by a rocky ledge. It was a primitive camp, with boughs dragged up from below serving as beds. The number of empty food tins scattered about indicated that it had been in use a number of days.

A great coat, ragged and soiled, yet still valuable in that exposed position because of its thickness and evident warmth, lay on a rock near the embers of a dying fire. After glancing carefully around to see that they were still out of sight of the men, Alex. picked the garment up and began a search through the pockets, still whole and mostly empty.

"Have you any idea they left their cards in there?" grinned Case.

"Never can tell," replied the other. "Sometimes people leave things in pockets. Anyway there may be a tailor's label on the coat which will tell us where it came from."

He drew out a paper as he spoke and tossed it to one side with the remark that they were saving up fire-lighters.

"Now, don't throw that newspaper away," Case protested. "Hand it here! It may show the town they visited last. Calgary, date, eh?"

"How old is it?" asked Alex., at once interested. "When was it printed, I mean. That may tell us something."

"A week ago," was the reply. "They must have secured it at Donald or Beaver, for that matter. It will be new to us, anyhow, whatever date it is. Not much of a newspaper, after all, though."

"Just don't be in a hurry!" Alex. suggested, as Case laid the newspaper down on the ground. "There is a marked item in it."

"Oh, just a few pencil marks," Case admitted. "Nothing to them."

"It tells about the train robbers hiding in the mountains," Alex. explained, reading over the headlines. "And here's another item under it. Listen to this, will you?"

"'Chicago, April 1,' " the boy read aloud. "'An unprovoked murder was committed on Wells street late last night. Charles Stiven, employed as bar-keeper at a South Side saloon, was attacked by Richard Miller, of the importing firm of Durand & Miller, and shot to death. The injured man did not die on the street where the shooting took place, but later expired at St. Joseph's hospital, after making a statement which is likely to hang Richard Miller if he is caught. Miller escaped after the shooting and had not been captured at the hour of going to press. No reason is given for the brutal attack.' "

"Rather old news, that," Case remarked. "Why, we were in Chicago when that affair took place. Anything more about it?"

"Just a short description of Miller," was the reply. "It says he is unusually tall, with——"

The boy stopped and looked up at Case with a question mark in each excited eye. Then he arose and held the paper out so Case could read the paragraph where his finger was placed. The boy did so wonderingly.

“‘Unusually tall, with long arms,’” the boy read, following Alex.’s slowly moving finger. “Now, what do you think of that, young fellow?”

“That’s the man that was on the train,” Alex. declared. “That’s the man Gran. talked with in the cedars! That’s the man who took Gran. off in our rowboat! No wonder the lad doesn’t want to say a word about his adventures on the mountains. What can it all mean?”

“I’m going right back and show this to him!” Case cried. “I’m going to know all about this. Gran.’s got to come through on this, as the police officers say. Don’t you think that’s what we ought to do?” he asked as the other looked grave and doubtful.

“We’ve trusted him so far,” Alex. replied, “and I see no reason why we should not continue to do so. Besides, the boy is ill, and must not be excited. But, look here, that man is undoubtedly still around here somewhere. Why he sent the boy over the mountains alone is more than I can say, but a man who will commit an unprovoked murder is equal to almost anything! We’d better get back to the *Rambler*. He may try to get the boy away again. We’ll look after this Mr. Richard Miller, all right!”

“You just bet we will!” was the answer, and the boys, forgetting, for the moment, the men whose camp they had invaded, crept out of the tumbled rocks and, once out of range of the three men on the

hills, hastened toward the *Rambler*. Half way to the river, Alex. paused.

"I wonder if the men we saw aren't officers, looking after this Miller person?" he asked. "They've got the description of him, you know."

"No they haven't!" chuckled Case. "I brought it away with me."

"That was a foolish thing to do," Alex. protested. "Now they will know that their camp has been visited. I reckon we'd better get the *Rambler* under way just as soon as we get to it. If we don't they'll find us and make trouble."

Case agreed with this view of the matter, and, as they stood on the east bank of the Columbia, waiting for Clay to run across and get them, they decided to tell him all about it and to advise an immediate departure for Upper Arrow lake, where Gran. would, they thought, be safe.

Clay was not a little excited at the recital. He agreed with the boys that they ought to leave at once, and preparations for departure were accordingly begun. Gran. looked on indolently at first, but finally called Clay to his side and asked:

"Are you going to leave this section of country now?"

"Of course," was the guarded reply. "We want to get to the Pacific before snow flies, and we have a long way to go. Besides, we do not want to remain too long in one place."

"But you wanted to hunt over on the plateau, this morning," Gran. urged. "And why did the boys come back from the mountain so soon? Is there anything wrong?"

"Why, of course not," Clay answered. "Only we have the moving-on spirit to-day. We'll drop down to Revelstoke and get a sight of the Canadian Pacific right of way before night, or, at least, before morning. That will connect us with civilization, at least," he added, with a grin.

"I'm afraid the motion of the boat will hurt my leg," Gran. urged, not looking Clay in the eyes. "I want to get well as rapidly as possible, you know. Can't you wait a few days—wait here?"

"I'll talk with the boys," Clay promised and went out. When he told them of the request Gran. had made, their eyes stuck out "good and plenty," as he afterwards expressed it. It was a puzzle to all of them.

"But why should he want to stay here?" Case asked, in amazement. "Why shouldn't he want to get away from a valley which must have unpleasant recollections for him? He would have died in that hut if we hadn't happened along! And the man we've been talking about brought him to it all by taking him away from us. It is the strangest thing I ever heard."

"He went away with the man willingly," Clay explained, "at least we saw him make no attempt

to get away when we were close at hand, and might have helped him. Now, how do we know that he is not waiting in this valley to meet this man again? This Richard Miller, who is wanted in Chicago for the crime of murder. I suppose," he added, thoughtfully, "that there can be no doubt about the description? The man described in the newspaper article is the man we saw on the train, the man who talked to Gran. in the cedar canyon, the man who was rowing when Gran. passed down stream and flung the note in the water?"

"Not a doubt of it," Case asserted. "That is the man—Richard Miller, the man wanted in Chicago to answer to the crime of murder!"

"But, look here," said Alex., always ready to defend Gran., "stop and think a minute! If Gran. went with this man willingly, why didn't he stop long enough to tell us he was going? Why didn't he tell the man to row up to the *Rambler* and let him explain? Why was it necessary for him to put what he had to say to us on paper, and then stop his writing in the middle of a sentence. I don't believe he left us willingly."

"One reason why the man—this Richard Miller—did not let him come up to the *Rambler* was that he had our rowboat—the boat which had been cut loose from her chain the night before. Say," he continued, with a blush and a laugh, "I'm getting this mixed. It was the anchor that he cut away,

and not the boat! At least, I think he did! He wouldn't want to come to close quarters with us after doing that, would he?

"Well, he might as well have cut the boat loose," Clay said, "for he stole it after it had drifted away. We saw him in it. That's proof!"

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" asked Case, turning to Clay.

"Let's stay here and see it out!" Alex. interposed.

"That suits me!" Clay answered. "I haven't lost confidence in Gran. yet, and, besides, there'll be excitement in it, if what you boys say about the men on the other side of the river is true—if they are really train robbers. I think it will be fun to see it out!"

And so it was agreed that they should follow the wishes of the boy and remain where they were for a time, although they all understood that the reason given by the lad—that the motion of the boat might affect his broken leg unfavorably—was not the true one. But another surprise awaited Clay when he went into the cabin to acquaint Gran. of the decision which had been reached. The boy was half sitting up in his bunk with a flush on his cheeks which had not been there before.

"I'll tell you what," he said, as Clay entered. "I am beginning to think that my leg ought to have the care of a surgeon. You boys are all anxious to

be on your way, and so why not drop down to Revelstoke? I can endure the short journey, all right, and we can remain there a few days until the surgeon has had time to straighten me out."

"We have all agreed to remain here," Clay said, with a smile, "but we can go on just as well as not. We need a glimpse at a town."

"I don't want to keep you here," Gran. went on. "When I spoke about staying here I didn't think I would need the attention of a surgeon, but I begin to feel that one ought to be consulted."

When Clay went out to the others with this new proposition they were more puzzled than ever.

"Why did he change his mind so suddenly?" was the question Alex. asked. "There's something back of all this. Do you think he heard us talking about the train robbers?"

"He might," answered Clay, and there the subject was dropped.

That night, without mishap on the way, they tied up at Revelstoke, which is a small town where the Candian Pacific takes to the valley of the Columbia river again. They did not succeed in finding a surgeon that night, the one located there being away, neither did they spend any time about town, for they thought it best to remain on the boat with the injured boy.

The next morning Clay found the surgeon at his office and sent him down to the *Rambler*, himself

remaining in a general store to purchase a few luxuries for the lad. While there he heard considerable talk about the chase after the train robbers, who were thought to be in that section.

"I'd like to be the one to catch them," he heard a rough-looking man saying. "It would be worth \$10,000 to me. I need the money!"

"If I could only point them out," another cut in, "I would be satisfied. There's a reward of \$5,000 for just locating them."

Clay left the store with the reward bee buzzing in his cap. They were not plentifully supplied with money, and a portion of that reward would be very acceptable. And the three men in the mountains! Perhaps they were the very men wanted by the officers.

While he walked about, thinking the matter over, the surgeon came into the one street of the place and stopped him, rather brusquely, he thought. Clay had an idea that it was his fee he wanted.

"Where did you pick up that boy?" the surgeon asked.

"He came into the country with us," Clay answered, not very pleasantly, for he believed that the surgeon was interfering with something that was none of his business. He turned away, but the other followed.

"You mean that he came from Laggan with you," he said.

"How do you know that?" demanded Clay, getting angry.

"Well," sneered the surgeon, "this boy's description is among those of the hold-up men. He, or some one looking remarkably like him, was seen on the pass, in the company of the men who are believed to have held up the Canadian Pacific train. I'm going now to notify an officer."

Clay, for a moment, did not answer. What was there he could say?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE POLICEMAN MAKES A MISTAKE.

"THE boy was with us, in the *Rambler*, on a platform car on a Canadian Pacific train, going towards Donald, when the robbery took place," Clay explained, directly, trying hard to keep his temper in the face of the impudence and greed shown by the surgeon.

"You'll have to prove that!" said the surgeon. "Why are you boys hiding in that motor boat, anyway? Have you been carrying supplies to the men who did the actual work in the robbery? And there was some one shot on a train leaving the pass, on the night of the robbery. Was it a bullet that broke the lad's leg? You'd better be frank with me."

"You ought to know whether the injury was caused by a bullet or not," replied Clay, beginning the story of the trip down the Columbia and ending with the finding of the boy in the shelter he had hastily constructed.

During the recital, however, he said not a word about the man who had so often presented himself to their notice.

"That's all very well," the surgeon said, "but it

only shows that the boy is mixed up in some secret matter, even if you boys are not in the game with him. Here comes DeYoung, the policeman, now, and I'll turn the matter over to him, but I want you for a witness to prove that I found the boy and pointed him out to the officer. I want that reward."

"I thought so!" Clay replied, scornfully. "That's what you are working for! Well, you won't get it. I'll attend to that!"

DeYoung, the policeman, now came up and held a short conversation with the surgeon. Clay was not permitted to hear what was being said, but at the termination of the conference the policeman, a member of the mounted force, approached him with a scowl on his face.

"So you've been harboring a train robber, have you?" he demanded. "I think I'll take you all in and hold you for identification. I'll go to the boat now and get the boy. Come along, doctor, and assist."

"But the boy mustn't be moved!" cried Clay, in alarm.

"Oh, mustn't he?" snarled the officer. "We'll see about that!"

"It will be all right to move him," the surgeon said.

"Of course! And I'll see that the boys are kept away from him, too."

"It may be just as well to put them in separate

cells," suggested the surgeon. "One of them may confess, after going hungry a short time."

Clay was angry enough to fight, but he knew that such a course would be worse than useless. These men had the power to do as they pleased until higher officers were reached.

It will be understood, however, that he felt pretty ugly at the idea of being parted from the injured boy. That would be a great deal worse than having the river trip interrupted and being locked up in a Canadian prison, he thought.

He argued with the policeman and the surgeon to no purpose. Their eyes were fixed on the reward. The thought, the prospect, of receiving so great a sum completely blinded their eyes to all sense of justice and humanity. Clay resolved, then, that they should both suffer for their brutality if they removed the boy and locked them all up.

He thought of telling the policeman of the men who had been hiding in the mountains. To his mind these were the robbers. He believed that the officer might gain the \$10,000 reward by following his instructions, and that he, himself, might secure the \$5,000 reward by pointing out the whereabouts of the men.

But he instantly banished the thought of helping the brutal officer get a cent of the money. He would rather take the chance of letting the men get

away and losing his own share of the money offered for their arrest and conviction.

Things looked pretty dark for the boys just then. If arrested and locked up, the *Rambler* would be at the mercy of the lawless men who frequented the river there. Without doubt, all the stores would be stolen. Even the boat itself might be taken. It looked like the end of their long-planned journey down the Columbia river.

As the boy walked briskly toward the boat, accompanied by the two men, he saw a man in uniform beckoning to the officer, who pretended not to see him. However, he said to the surgeon, in a tone of great vexation which Clay did not fail to note:

"There's Sergeant Wilcox! If he gets his eyes on the boy before I do, he will claim the reward. He is too soft to carry this thing through, anyway. He'll let the boys talk him out of the money. We'd better make haste to the boat. If Wilcox wasn't my superior officer, I'd take a crack at his head with a billy. He's always butting in!"

Clay had heard enough to convince him that Sergeant Wilcox was the man he wanted to talk with! Should he prove considerate and reasonable, he should receive the information which would be worth \$10,000 to him—the information which a little decency on the part of DeYoung might have won for him!

When the policeman and the surgeon started

toward the boat at a pace calculated to get them there before Sergeant Wilcox could overtake them, Clay hung back and DeYoung seized him by the arm to hurry him along. The boy drew away and ran toward the Sergeant, who advanced to meet him.

"What's the matter here?" the Sergeant asked, not unkindly.

"This officer has arrested me, and threatens to arrest my chums," Clay explained, "and I want you to hear my story."

"Certainly, my boy," replied the Sergeant. "You don't look like a very hardened criminal," he added, as DeYoung approached with a pair of handcuffs dangling in his hands, "so I guess we won't have you ironed."

"This boy and his chums," stormed DeYoung, "are connected with the train robbers, and I have arrested them all as such. I'm now going to the boat you see down there to take them all to jail."

"One of the boys has a broken leg," pleaded Clay, "and ought not to be moved. And everything we have will be stolen if we are taken away from our boat and locked up."

"It won't injure the boy to be moved," the surgeon cut in, "and I'll see that their property is not molested. We, DeYoung and I, think we have that reward cinched!"

"Oh, you do!" cried Clay, with flashing eyes.

"You'd ruin us boys in the hope of getting it, too!"

"The injured lad shall not be moved, nor shall he lock you up until we have plenty of proof," said the Sergeant.

"You're a gentleman!" Clay burst out, tears of gratitude showing in his eyes. "You're a gentleman, and I'm going to tell you where to find the robbers! I should have told this other officer if he had acted half-way decent. I think I know where the men you want are, at least, and you can get them in a short time, too."

"Why didn't you tell me?" almost shrieked DeYoung. "You ought to have told me. I was the first officer you met. It was your duty to have told the first officer you met!"

"Because you're a brute," answered Clay, secure in the protection of the Sergeant. "If you'll send him away, Sergeant," the boy added, "I'll take you to the boat and tell you the whole story. But perhaps you'd better get your men together, **all** ready to go after the robbers."

"It is a plant!" cried DeYoung. "He wants to send us away so the robbers can raid the town. Don't you believe a word he says!"

"Go back to the station, DeYoung," the Sergeant ordered. "When I want any advice from you I'll ask for it. And we can get along without your company, too, doctor," he added.

"But we claim the reward!" said the surgeon,

angrily. "You can't come here with your high and mighty ways and insult me. I'm not under your authority! We claim the reward!"

"Get out!" replied the Sergeant. "Come, young man, we'll go to this boat you are all talking about, and you can tell me the story or not, just as you please. I'm working to do my duty, not expressly to win rewards. DeYoung sees nothing but the reward, though he is a fairly efficient policeman. I'll have to transfer him into the woods farther!"

On the way to the boat Clay told the whole story, omitting nothing. He even told of their suspicions of Gran. and his strange disappearance, and of the three men seen on the mountain, and where they might be found, provided they had not moved on, which the boy considered doubtful.

"I understand the boy's part in the game," the officer said, "and think you have the robbers located, all right. And now about this other man—the fellow with the long arms. I think I have a line on him," with a queer smile. "I'll show you some dispatches presently which concern him."

Clay opened his eyes in amazement.

"Is he one of the robbers?" he asked.

The Sergeant laughed heartily.

"I think I have a surprise for you," he said. "You just wait a few hours. You don't know that I came here to meet this boat, do you?"

"Why, how did you know? What is the mys-

tery? We've been clouded in mystery ever since we left the mountain pass."

"You'll soon be out of it," replied the Sergeant. "You'll have a clear field to start another puzzle column in," he laughed.

"No more puzzle columns for me!" declared Clay. "But how did you know about the boat coming here?"

"Why," laughed the officer, "I even know the names of your chums! Second sight, eh! I know where you started from, and all about it. I've been waiting for you two days!"

"I give it up!" said Clay, and not another word would he say until the boat was reached and a general consultation was held. Gran. smiled when the Sergeant was introduced to him and said:

"We have been waiting a long time for you, Sergeant Wilcox!"

"Now, what do you think of that?" asked Case.

"I don't think any more!" laughed Clay. "I'm beyond being astonished at anything."

"Is Gran. under arrest?" asked Alex.

The Sergeant shook his head and held up a hand for silence.

"It is only a train from the east," Clay volunteered.

"Is that our train?" asked Gran., looking up into the Sergeant's face with a confiding smile. "Is that OUR train?"

"I hope so," replied the officer. "And now, Mr. Clay," he added, "you come with me to the station, and you may learn of something to your advantage, as the newspaper advertisements say. The others will remain here for the present."

"We're too paralyzed to make a movement," suggested Alex.

Captain Joe arose to follow Clay and Teddy shambled up to the officer and tried to climb up the official stripe on the seam of his trousers. The Sergeant laughed and patted the bear on the head.

"You're a happy family!" he said. "Come on, Clay."

Gran. waved a thin hand at the two departing ones and turned to Alex.

"You're going to hear the end of the story directly," he said. "I'm not going to tell it, though."

"Who is?" demanded Case. "We've been trying to tell it to each other ever since you came on the *Rambler* that night at the pass, and have made up our minds that we don't know it!"

"Of course not," Gran. said, and closed his eyes, leaving Alex. and Case half crazy with curiosity!

When the train drew up, the first man to leave the parlor coach made a rush for the Sergeant and shook him warmly by the hand. This done he looked Clay over with a curious smile on a face recently shaved clean.

The man was at least six foot three, and had very

long arms. Also a slight limp! Clay sat down on a trunk and waited.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORE SURPRISES THAN ONE.

"THIS," the boy heard Sergeant Wilcox saying, directly, "is Mr. Richard Miller, of Chicago. And this, Mr. Miller, is Mr. Clayton Emmett, also known as 'Clay,' recently from Chicago!"

Clay heard the words dimly. The world seemed turning around upside down. Here was the man he had been accusing of all sorts of crime, from simple larceny to murder, on good terms with the chief, in that district, of the mounted police! It was enough to turn the lad's head.

"I thought——"

Then Clay decided not to say what he had been thinking, and the three set out for the boat, passing DeYoung and the surgeon on the way. They both regarded the officer with scowls and threatening gestures.

At the boat the boy lifted on his bunk when Mr. Miller approached and extended his arms. The man dropped down at his side.

"Daddy! Daddy!" they hear Gran. saying.

"I'm going out somewhere and have another dream!" Alex. said. "I'm afraid I'll never wake up out of this one. That is the man who stole our boat and the man who cut our anchor chain!"

"Not exactly!" said Miller. "I'm going to tell you about that, after I return something I have of yours."

He reached into a pocket and brought forth a packet of films and developed pictures. The pictures showed campfire scenes, and back of the faces before the blaze was the face of a tall man, looking out in wonder.

"Where did you get them developed?" asked Alex. "Where did you get them, anyway? We always thought Gran. took them."

"I did," admitted the boy, with a smile, "and gave them to Daddy, and he had them developed at Donald and sent copies to the police at Chicago. See that face back of the others? That's Daddy."

"Then he's one of the train robbers!" declared Case.

"But he was with them, and the officers have his description, as well as that of Gran.," Alex. insisted when the officer shook his head.

"Yes, he was with them," the Sergeant said, "and so was Gran., up to that night. They did not know what the three men were there for, and when they discovered that they were there to rob a train they left them, the boy making friends with you

boys and going on the *Rambler*, and the father getting on the train and being chased off."

"But why didn't they both come to us and tell us?" asked Clay. "We would have taken them both in."

"But there was a charge of murder against Mr. Miller," replied the officer, "and he did not know you boys so well then as he has learned to know you since that night. He couldn't make up his mind to trust you."

"We know what the charge is," Alex. said. "We found the newspaper which the robbers left in their camp."

"Richard Miller was in Wells street the night Stiven was shot," the Sergeant went on, "but he did not do the shooting. That was done by Blinn, Carr, and Snow, the three men you saw in the hills, the three men who held up the train."

"When the shots which killed Stiven were fired, Mr. Miller got out of the way, naturally. He saw the faces of the three men, and started to the Chicago avenue police station to inform the officers as to their identity. On the way there he heard a conversation between officers which informed him that he was suspected, and that the three men were to testify against him."

"All he could do, under the circumstances, was to hide, unless he wanted to be held without bail pending trial. He made it his business that night, with

the aid of a Pinkerton man, to locate the three murderers, and from that day on he followed them, hoping that in some way they would finally betray the truth.

“He followed them to many cities, and finally, when they came to the Rocky mountains he sent for his son, Gran., to join him. Together they joined the robbers and sought information which would clear the father of the crime.

“The chance to prove his innocence never came to the father until the night these pictures were taken. They located the robbers on the ground where the robbery took place. When he left them that night, after Gran. had gone to the *Rambler*, he knew that the train was to be held up, as a previous attempt had been made on the freight.

“He knew, too, that the pictures taken by Alex. would prove sufficient to convict them, as their portraits are in the rogue’s gallery at Chicago. He tried to warn the conductor of the train that took the boat away that a hold-up was in the air, but the conductor wouldn’t listen, and caused him to be chased from the train—as he thought.

“However, Mr. Miller rode on the train, wounded by the bullet, to Donald, saw Gran. there for a minute, and arranged to have the films taken so that he might have them developed. It was also arranged that he was to purchase a rowboat and follow the *Rambler* until the films were delivered to

him. Then he was to go away and have them developed.

"Father and son had many meetings which you never knew about, and when, at last, the films were delivered to the father, he was afraid to go out with them, as the officers were looking for him on advices from Chicago. So he took Gran. away with him, and, after the pictures had been made and Chicago communicated with, the boy returned over the mountains, though his father tried to get him to wait and meet you here.

"Then I came into the game. Mr. Miller came to me here with the story and the pictures. He also told me where the boat was and how soon it would be here. Then he went up to Calgary to shave and dress up like a gentleman.

"But he did not know that the robbers had followed you boys into the mountains in the hope of getting the boat, of capturing Gran., and closing his lips forever, for they had suspicions that he had gone out to betray them. They cut the anchor chain, hoping that you would all be drowned in the rapids. But it was Mr. Miller who caught the rowboat and used it until he left for this point. It was wrecked after he left it. Anything else?" asked the Sergeant, as he concluded.

"Why didn't they tell us all about it?" asked Case. "What was the use of being so sly about it?"

"If they had understood you all then as well as they do now," the officer replied, "they would doubtless have done so."

"Why did he chase me when I was getting away with the pictures?" asked Alex., pointing to Mr. Miller.

"Because I wanted the films," laughed the other, "and I got them, in time, as you all know!"

"I wonder why the robbers didn't kill us while we slept, if they wanted us out of the way, instead of cutting the anchor chain," Case puzzled. "I should think they would have made a sure thing of it."

"I wondered at that," the Sergeant said, "but I think now that they were afraid that the murder would be discovered and that they would be suspected. Anyway such a crime as that, when the river gave up the bodies, would have filled this district with police officers, and they would have made it very uncomfortable for the robbers. They doubtless thought, too, that the rapids would do the work satisfactorily."

"And the robbers built the signal fire?" asked Clay.

"Yes," answered the officer. "At least that is what Mr. Miller thinks. They must have separated, and wanted to get together again."

"When are you going out after them?" asked Clay.

"I have a company of men forming now," was the reply. "You boys remain here a few days and you'll see them brought in. Of course the boys who saw them in the mountains and reported it will get the \$5,000 reward offered for locating the robbers. That will help some, eh?" he added, with a smile.

"We can get along without it," Gran. broke in. "I guess Daddy has enough money for us all. He's spent \$10,000 on this man-hunt, but he had to do it, or forever live under the suspicion that he killed the man Stiven and bought himself clear. The only thing for him to do was to follow the murderers and keep with them until he knew that he could convict them. They will never confess. We can introduce in the trial THE CONFESSION OF A PHOTOGRAPH!"

There were many little details which the boys had wondered over set to rights that day, and father and son told many amusing stories of their trip out with the films. Until they had confided the whole story to the Sergeant, they were in danger of arrest.

The Sergeant went out with a dozen men that night, and in two days was back with the prisoners, who confessed to the robbery as soon as they saw their pictures in the group by the campfire. Their "mugs" were already well known to the police, and they knew that the pictures showing them on the

scene of the robbery just before it took place would be sufficient to convict them.

"You will have no trouble in getting the \$5,000 reward," the Sergeant said to the boys, as they were getting ready to move on down the Columbia river. "By the time you reach Portland it will be waiting for you."

It may be as well to state that the money was awaiting them at Portland, and that they at once planned another trip, this one to the Colorado river.

Mr. Miller went back to Chicago with the robbers, and Gran., although his leg was still useless, decided to go on with the boys. The father was to meet them in Portland later. He was a very rich man. Gran. always declared that only for that he would have been hanged for the murder of Stiven!

There was sincere regret at parting with Sergeant Wilcox, for he had greatly assisted in straightening out the tangle. He promised to meet the boys later on, but under what strange circumstances they were to meet again they had no premonition at that time!

And so, once more, the boys were afloat on the Columbia! With minds free from mystery and financial worry, they spent the long summer, up to the first of September, making their way to the Pacific.

There were hard days and night, for the river is rough and wild in many places, but there were also

sunny days when the *Rambler* glided over the water like a duck in a fountain pond!

And Captain Joe and Teddy, the bear, enjoyed the trip as much as the boys did. When there were campfires on the shore at night the two had many a run in the forest. And Teddy always returned, to sleep with his soft little nose against the dog's hairy shoulder!

Alex. caught fish, Case made bread, and Clay hunted up the history of the country they were passing through and read it to them in the cabin after the amusement-filled days were over. It was in every way an ideal trip—a summer trip over one of the grandest rivers in the world.

"I hope," Clay said, one night in Portland, after it was all over, "that we shall have as much fun on the Colorado."

"It was pretty serious sometimes on the Columbia," Gran. said.

"Oh, yes, but we enjoyed it, except the time a bear wanted me to come out of my tree!" laughed Alex. "The Colorado offers chances for just as much excitement. Don't you ever think we are going to a pink tea party when we sail down the Colorado, through the canyons and over the rapids?"

Whether or not the trip down the Colorado was a "pink tea party" will be told in the next volume of this series: "The Motor Boat Boys on the Colorado; or, the Clue in the Rocks."

And Captain Joe and Teddy? They were as happy at the finish of the Columbia river trip as the others, and as ready to go over to the Colorado and do it all over again!

THE END.

